



PUBLIC SPECTACLES

in Roman and Late Antique Palestine

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PUBLIC SPECTACLES
in ROMAN and LATE
ANTIQUAE PALESTINE

Zeev Weiss



Harvard University Press

Cambridge, Massachusetts · London, England

2014

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Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Weiss, Zeev, 1959-

Public spectacles in Roman and late antique Palestine / Zeev Weiss.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-674-04831-7 (alk. paper)

1. Entertainment events—Palestine—History. 2. Popular culture—Palestine—History.
3. Palestine—Social life and customs. 4. Romans—Palestine. 5. Palestine—Antiquities, Roman. 6. Palestine—Antiquities. 7. Palestine—History—To 70 A.D. 8. Palestine—History—70-638. I. Title.

GV31.W45 2014

796.0937—dc23

2013027086

To Hedva

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Preface

THE IDEA OF ADDRESSING the topic of public spectacles in Roman and late antique Palestine came to me for the first time over twenty years ago, when I was looking for a subject for my doctoral dissertation. Trained in classical archaeology, I became interested in buildings for mass entertainment in antiquity and realized that very few studies on public spectacles in the Roman world have referred, if at all, to the abundant evidence from ancient Palestine and Arabia—be it in the form of building remains, the performances themselves, or information culled from rabbinic literature. Being familiar with the archaeological finds and rabbinic literature, and aware of the dearth of a comprehensive analysis of the monumental theaters, hippodromes, and amphitheaters in the region, and the events held in them, I decided to devote my dissertation to “Games and Spectacles in Roman Palestine and Their Reflection in Talmudic Literature,” written at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem under the supervision of Professors Lee I. Levine and Gideon Foerster. My interdisciplinary research analyzed both the archaeological finds and literary sources—primarily Jewish texts—focusing on the buildings, their architectural layout, and the nature of the performances held in them, while discussing each institution separately and its various

forms of entertainment in the Roman period only (late first through third centuries CE).

Returning to the study of public spectacles in ancient Palestine after so many years, and after becoming a seasoned archaeologist and scholar, presented an opportunity to rewrite and completely revise my dissertation from a different vantage point, while expanding the scope of research to cover many other topics heretofore not addressed. Unlike my first study, this volume does not attempt to encompass all aspects connected to the archaeological finds, but rather uses the material remains to illustrate and assess behavioral patterns of the indigenous population over time and space. It is a sociocultural and historical inquiry epitomizing a cultural phenomenon that affected the lifestyle of many generations in ancient Palestine, from its inception during the reign of Herod the Great until its decline and complete disappearance six hundred years later, at the end of Justinian's reign.

After completing my dissertation in 1995, and having been engaged in several other unrelated projects, including my ongoing excavations at Sepphoris, I made a deliberate decision to put the manuscript aside, keeping in mind that I would someday publish this study. In retrospect, I think I made the right decision. The experience I have amassed over the years, as well as my fuller knowledge and honed insight gained from new excavations and recent scholarship, demanded a major revision and expansion of the subject, which, I believe, have improved and enhanced the resultant volume.

In the course of my work I have enjoyed the support of several academic institutions and frameworks. I began the current study when I was a fellow at the Scholion Interdisciplinary Research Center in Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem from 2006 to 2009. In 2011, I was privileged to spend a month at the *Maison méditerranéenne des sciences de l'homme* (MMSH) in Aix-en-Provence and had the opportunity to visit many sites in Roman Gaul; this allowed me to assess the cultural changes there that were comparable to those transpiring at approximately the same time in ancient Palestine and Arabia. I completed the manuscript in 2013, during my stay at Princeton University as

a visiting associate professor in the Council of Humanities and as a Stewart Fellow in Religion. The hospitality of these three preeminent institutions, the working conditions and availability of excellent facilities provided by each, and especially the wonderful people who invited and assisted me at the time, allowed me to make substantial progress in preparing this volume, and for this I am very appreciative.

I also extend my gratitude to the Faculty of Humanities of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and to the Ruth and David Amiran Foundation at the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University for their support in the final stages of preparing the manuscript and the indices.

Publication of the book in its prestigious format would never have been realized were it not for Professor Glen W. Bowersock's invitation to submit my manuscript, which was to be included in his *Revealing Antiquity* series at Harvard University Press. It is with great pleasure that I thank my friend and colleague Professor Bowersock for his kind offer, discerning comments upon reading the manuscript, and continuous encouragement over the years.

I have benefited immensely from the valuable comments, discussions, and suggestions of friends, colleagues, and mentors, some of whom read parts of the manuscript and whose helpful insights have served to enhance my study, and I am most grateful to them: Professors Gideon Foerster, Lee I. Levine, the late Ehud Netzer, Daniel R. Schwartz, William J. Slater, and Yoram Tsafrir. I also extend my gratitude to the anonymous reader whose comments helped to refine several points throughout the manuscript. I am indebted to my colleagues Walid Atrash, Gabriel Mazor, Chaim Ben-David, Pierre M. Blanc, Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, Adi Erlich, Elise A. Friedland, Peter Gendelman, Rivka Gersht, and Arthur Segal for their help in particular topics in each of their realms of expertise; and to Aldo Corcella, Hannah M. Cotton, Leah Di Segni, and Andrew W. White for sharing with me, prior to publication, their works on issues relevant to my research.

It is with great pleasure that I thank Anna Iamim and Ruhama Bonfil for preparing the plans in my book; Gabi Laron for providing me with some of his photographs; my students Maya Sherman, who was my research

assistant during the years I was at the Scholion, and Avner Ecker, who read the entire manuscript, commented wisely, and touched up some minor errors. Special gratitude is extended to Hani Davis, who assisted in translating several chapters and edited others; her superb editing skills, insight, experience, and uncompromising allegiance have vastly improved the manuscript. My appreciation goes to Harvard University Press for its commitment over the years to publish this volume, and especially to Sharmila Sen, its executive editor-at-large, for her efforts and expertise in producing this volume. I also wish to thank Heather Hughes, editorial assistant in the humanities at HUP, for her professional assistance, as well as the staff at Westchester Publishing Services for their efficient work on the volume.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my family, and especially my wife, Hedva, for her friendship and unstinting support over the years, at home and in faraway places, while on my long journey to unveil the impact of lost performances on mass audiences. It is to Hedva, who appreciates the beauty of art and culture, that I dedicate this book with boundless thanks and appreciation.

PUBLIC SPECTACLES
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ANTIQUE PALESTINE

Introduction

LEISURE ACTIVITIES—whether theatrical performances or shows of athletic prowess—are common in modern society. They are what the masses engage in when seeking light diversion from their mundane tasks. Human nature was no different in late antiquity, and then, like now, there were always pockets of society that looked askance upon contemporary fads. In the ancient world, public spectacles comprised four categories—agonistic competitions, circus races, theatrical performances, and amphitheatrical shows. Athletics, music, and other performing arts were competitive; some events, such as gladiatorial combats, *venationes*, and chariot races, contained competitive aspects, while mime, pantomime, and other light spectacles were pure divertissements. These performances were prominent throughout the Roman Empire and largely an expression of the urban culture in the ancient world. The growth in the number of festivals, and especially the monumental construction of buildings for mass entertainment—theaters, circuses, and amphitheaters—throughout the empire in the first three centuries of the Common Era provide abundant evidence for the popularity of such events.

Wishing to maintain a positive rapport with Rome and to integrate Roman cultural patterns into his realm, Herod the Great was the first to

introduce public spectacles and competitions in the Roman East, thereby revolutionizing the recreational habits of the indigenous populations. Very few cities offered performances during the reigns of Herod the Great and his successors, but by the second half of the first century CE, and especially during the second and third centuries, many buildings were constructed in Roman Palestine with the primary purpose of housing such events for the local populace. Holding public spectacles and competitions in some of these buildings continued into the late fourth and fifth centuries, and in some cases even beyond; however, in the course of the sixth century these institutions had declined and eventually disappeared.

The provincial boundaries of ancient Palestine—the hills of Judaea and Samaria, the coastal cities from Raphia up to Dor, the Lower Galilee, the northern Negev, and Peraea—were arbitrary and liable to change. The neighboring Provincia Arabia, established in 106 CE, extended over the wider area of the former Nabataean kingdom. This piece of land was shared throughout the centuries among several indigenous cultures—Hellenized Syrians, Nabataeans, Samaritans, and Jews, in addition to several foreign segments of society of Latin origin who belonged to the Roman administration or army legions. Beginning with the period of the *pax Romana* and following its trend in the ensuing centuries, the geographical boundaries of ancient Palestine did not necessarily reflect the administrative structure of the province; however, the consistent cultural disposition of the inhabitants in almost each and every city of the region adopting this new cultural trend warrants their classification as one locale.

The Jewish population was an important demographic group in ancient Palestine, yet not always the largest. Certain groups in this population expressed reservations regarding Roman public entertainment. It is possible that some affluent Hellenized Jews, who also may have been members of a municipal leadership in their hometowns, were involved in the initiation of public performances or the construction of buildings for mass entertainment. There is no direct evidence to support such an assumption, yet in reading the sources it becomes clear that many Jews

frequented the buildings for public entertainment and were fully aware of the nature of the shows held in the theaters, hippodromes, and amphitheaters. Only a few such buildings were constructed in the Jewish realm—in Jerusalem, Jericho, Tiberias, and Sepphoris; most of this cultural activity took place in the Graeco-Roman cities of ancient Palestine whose civic leaders built a variety of structures that provided mass entertainment for their citizens, including the ethnic minority of Jews residing there. The Jewish community's exposure to and contact with the surrounding Roman culture left their imprint on the Jewish literary sources composed and compiled when public entertainment flourished in ancient Palestine.

Many studies have examined the buildings for public entertainment in a broad context, the most salient being Margarete Bieber's notable investigation of Greek and Roman theaters and other, more recent, inquiries on the same topic.¹ Some of these studies examine the Roman circuses;² others take a close look at the amphitheaters.³ Each focuses on one type of structure, scrutinizing it from a variety of perspectives and occasionally referring to the archaeological finds emerging from ancient Palestine; almost none provides a comprehensive inventory, description, and analysis of these finds or refers to the plethora of sources embedded in rabbinic literature.⁴

Other studies are more comprehensive, combining in their discussions a wider range of performances. Richard Beacham deals with public entertainment in the late Republic and early empire while focusing mainly on Rome.⁵ Hazel Dodge, for her part, describes the structures that were used for Roman entertainment throughout the empire, while David Potter discusses the nature of the performances held in these buildings.⁶ These wide-ranging studies cover many centuries of public entertainment in both the Greek East and Roman West but, like the former, convey almost no evidence pertaining to ancient Palestine.

The vast amount of material evidence from ancient Palestine associated with these buildings has yielded several publications, mostly articles, devoted to the study of a single structure at a specific site while comparing its archaeological and architectural features to similar edifices

from elsewhere in the region;⁷ rarely do they discuss the nature of these institutions and the performances held in them in their wider context. Studies dealing more extensively with theaters, hippodromes, and amphitheaters in ancient Palestine indeed exist but are flawed by the narrow scope noted above;⁸ they also neglect to relate to the types of performances held therein or to the sociocultural aspects of these buildings and their influence on the local populace. Furthermore, they ignore almost entirely the important evidence embedded in rabbinic and Christian literature regarding these buildings and their various activities.

Another approach, albeit equally insufficient in its interdisciplinary scope, investigates the subject in light of rabbinic and Christian literary sources.⁹ Such studies make little attempt to explore the broader context of a tradition or understand it within its contemporary sociocultural setting. Moreover, relevant archaeological material that could present the data is scantily enlisted. Several studies explain and interpret words, terms, and ideas connected to institutions of leisure activities against the reality of Hellenistic-Roman culture,¹⁰ but these are interspersed throughout larger works and deal with only isolated occurrences; they do not presume to encompass the entire phenomenon and its sociocultural implications, or its place in Roman urban life and the Jewish settlements of ancient Palestine.

In the pioneering effort to collect the rabbinic sources pertaining to public entertainment in ancient Palestine, Samuel Krauss analyzes the various sources in light of what was known in his time about Graeco-Roman culture.¹¹ He refrains from evaluating the information owing to the meager archaeological finds known then, and from discussing the wider sociocultural implications that the Roman games had on the Jewish population in the first centuries CE. Other sociohistorical studies use Jewish literary sources to define the attitudes of Jewish society to Roman public entertainment. Manfred Lämmer focuses on the Herodian period, whereas Harold Harris, who deals with Greek athletics and the Jews, draws his observations mainly from Philo, Josephus, and the New Testament but rarely makes use of rabbinic literature.¹² Gideon Talpaz

and Estée Dvorjetski focus on the theater and its performances while making extensive use of rabbinic literature.¹³

The present volume offers a different approach, focusing on *all* building types in the region that were designated for public entertainment. The monumental buildings, theaters, hippodromes, and amphitheaters, as well as the range of performances, competitions, and shows they housed, created a cultural revolution in the leisure habits of the population in the Roman East. Although the various shows held in these buildings each had its own fabric and character, and presumably attracted a mixture of segments in Roman society, their combined investigation within the confines of one region led to the understanding that these institutions were the product of specific social and cultural circumstances. The wealth and variety of the available archaeological, artistic, epigraphical, and literary evidence—including valuable information gleaned from Jewish and Christian corpora—together with modern scholarly works dealing with relevant facets of this variegated subject, stand at the core of the study of public entertainment in ancient Palestine. Considering Judaea/Palaestina's long-standing social, historical, and cultural ties with the Nabataean kingdom, which in 106 became Provincia Arabia, the assortment of finds pertaining to the Decapolis (confederation of Greek cities in northern Transjordan and adjacent areas whose activities were limited to the religious and culture domain) and other cities in Arabia will be included in the discussion for parallels, comparison, and contextualization.¹⁴ Our inquiry covers an extended period and epitomizes a cultural phenomenon that affected the lifestyle of many generations, from its rise during the reign of Herod the Great to its fall and complete disappearance six centuries later, at the end of Justinian's reign.

The comprehensive presentation of archaeological finds and literary sources in this volume allows for the drawing of a detailed profile of the various forms of leisure activity held in the region, the nature of the shows that took place in each building, their cultural roots, and their development over time. In addition to examining the role of Roman public spectacles and competitions in ancient Palestine, this study reveals

their cultural impact on the region as a whole and helps to define the attitudes of the Jewish population toward this dimension of society. Herod's massive building activity left a long-lasting imprint on the region; his dream of integrating Palestine culturally into the rest of the Roman Empire and transforming it into a Roman enclave succeeded far beyond his rule and the bounds of his realm.

Rabbinic sources provide valuable information pertaining to public entertainment. The rabbis' discourses were not tailored merely to fit academic discussions detached from real life, but were infused with many details about daily life in ancient Palestine. Special attention has been given, therefore, to the plethora of such sources in both *tannaitic* (first to second centuries CE) and *amoraic* (third to early fifth centuries CE) literature. Analyses of rabbinic literature have advanced greatly in recent years; new approaches and methods for examining rabbinic literature have been developed, and many scientific editions of these early corpora and *Genizah* fragments that corroborate and further clarify many of these texts are now available.

However, rabbinic literature is rife with methodological problems. Were the rabbis accurate in transmitting information regarding this cultural phenomenon, which was completely foreign to their own lives? Do their sermons reflect their own observations or their community's, or do they relay a wider knowledge drawn from other, more reliable, sources? Do the literary nature of the sources, the validity of testimonies of some earlier rabbis appearing in later collections, and the extent of the redactor's involvement in creating the actual text in its appropriate context serve as valid indicators of the wider societal reality, or were they tailored to fit their academic discussions? A balanced use of the sources accompanied by a thorough inquiry into their meaning, origin, and plausibility have great value in shedding light on certain aspects that the archaeological finds cannot. Rabbinic sources provide a glimpse into the *realia* of antiquity, while the archaeological remains allow one to touch them. The mutual study of these two disciplines, treated equally and balanced by modern methods of inquiry, is decisive and promising.

This volume is divided into six chapters. It opens with Herod the Great's introduction of the Roman spectacles and competitions into ancient Palestine and their survival throughout the Herodian period. A description of the evidence for Herod's projects is followed by a brief discussion of the various performances known throughout the Roman world. The impact of this initial stage is evaluated in light of the architectural semblance of the buildings constructed by Herod and his successors, the types of events held therein, and the reactions of the local communities to this new cultural phenomenon. The archaeological finds facilitate tracing the architectural and cultural sources that shaped the buildings and activities introduced in this period. I argue that Herod acted creatively and innovatively when exposing his kingdom to these new leisure activities, as he did with his other building projects, incorporating architectural and artistic traditions from both East and West—that is, the Hellenistic and Roman spheres, respectively. Herod's undertakings in ancient Palestine effected dramatic changes in the recreational habits of the local populations; the number of such buildings and their cultural impact increased gradually in the second half of the first century CE and subsequent centuries.

Chapter 2 discusses in detail the various structures—theaters, hippodromes, and amphitheaters—and their role within the city. The number of buildings constructed in ancient Palestine is calculated by type, chronological sequence of construction, distribution throughout the region, and location within the city limits. With the collected data it is possible to explore the types of buildings that were constructed in each city, how they shaped the cityscape, and what impression, if any, they left on the local populace of ancient Palestine. This chapter also presents a thematic study of the actual buildings constructed in the region and includes an architectural analysis of each, as well as their comparison to similar structures known in the Roman world. The array of topics discussed in this chapter affords a better understanding of the acculturative effect of Roman public entertainment on the local communities of ancient Palestine.

Chapter 3 offers a comprehensive discussion of the types and cultural origins of the performances, competitions, and shows held in each institution during this period in ancient Palestine, based on the available sources. It opens with a presentation of the types of performances held in the theater, continues with the athletic competitions and chariot races that took place in the hippodrome, which was regionally adapted to accommodate these events, and concludes with the spectacles conducted in the amphitheater. The various performances followed a prevalent pattern known throughout the Roman world, yet the range of activities held in the region over time provides a sense of the cultural proclivities of the local population, which, in fact, is characterized as a mixture between East and West.

Chapter 4 addresses the monetary backing for the construction of theaters, hippodromes, and amphitheaters, as well as the maintenance and support of the performances held in each locale. Herod initially funded the construction of the buildings and the productions held in them; however, in the ensuing periods it was the local municipality and affluent citizens who shouldered these costs, placing a heavy burden on each city's economy. The organization of performances, spectacles, and competitions and the responsibility for their ongoing operation, requiring long-term financing and other arrangements, provide concrete evidence for how Roman forms of entertainment were organized in ancient Palestine and how their actual financing influenced a city's economy.

Chapter 5 focuses on Jewish society in late antiquity and its relationship to the Roman world of entertainment. The Jewish population constituted an important social segment in the region, whereas rabbinic literature provides a range of sources pertaining to public spectacles in ancient Palestine. The discussion assesses the degree to which the Jews were familiar with the various forms of mass entertainment in their time, as well as their active participation as either performers or spectators, and then follows with an examination of rabbinic attitudes toward Roman public entertainment in response to the behavior of the Jewish community. The disparate attitudes toward Roman public entertainment in ancient Palestine, of the general Jewish population on the one hand

and the rabbinic elite on the other, are discussed at length. Interestingly, such disparities characterized both the Jewish and Christian communities from the third to sixth centuries CE. Although the religious leadership (which considered itself a social, cultural, and moral elite) of each viewed such activities as reprehensible, it is evident that not only the members of these two communities attended such events, but some of the church fathers and rabbis who criticized these forms of recreation in their homilies were also quite familiar with them.

Chapter 6 concludes the volume with a discussion of the final phase of this sociocultural phenomenon in late antique Palestine, when some performances were banned by decree and others were fiercely attacked by the Christian church and its spokesmen. It focuses on the configuration of these entertainment structures in late antiquity until they ceased to be used and, finally—based on the available literary evidence and other sources from ancient Palestine—the types of performances conducted in this era. It will become evident that the number of shows in the region diminished gradually in the late fourth and fifth centuries and completely disappeared by the end of Justinian's reign, leaving behind a legacy of ruined buildings partly covered by debris and weeds, but whose monumental presence commemorates the beauty and splendor of a once vibrant cultural lifestyle.

1

The Beginning: The Introduction of Public Spectacles and Competitions into Ancient Palestine

THE REIGN OF HEROD, the builder-king, is characterized by large-scale construction that dramatically changed the face of ancient Palestine. Appointed king of Judaea by the Roman Senate, Herod initiated, planned, and constructed the buildings in his realm. His edifices were commensurate with the ceremonial lifestyle in his palaces, as were the public buildings he constructed for the inhabitants of many cities in ancient Palestine, some of which he himself had founded. The king's personal involvement in these projects stemmed from his particular interest in architecture, his strong ambition, and his need to establish a foothold for the royal dynasty at home and abroad as well as express loyalty to his patrons and friends in Rome. In turn, the monumental building projects in the kingdom undoubtedly broadened ancient Palestine's horizons, introducing the local population to the innovative construction, planning, and decorations of the wealthy in Rome, and, first and foremost, influencing the lifestyle and daily habits of the local population—its cult, society, commerce, economy, and leisure culture.

The builder-king invested large sums of money, energy, and thought in monumentalizing his kingdom and also contributed from his own funds to the building of new structures or the renovation of old ones

beyond his realm, in nearby cities and faraway places across the sea. In Tyre and Berytus he built halls, porticoes, temples, and marketplaces; in Byblos he renovated the city walls; and in Laodicea he constructed an aqueduct. His contributions even went as far as to help the people of Antioch, Rhodes, and Chios, as well as Nicopolis, which the emperor founded near Actium and in which Herod erected most of its public buildings.¹ The king's deeds and generosity were recognized by many, including the emperor and Agrippa, and undoubtedly also had a profound effect on the recipients of his gifts. The historian Flavius Josephus remarked: "The extent of Herod's realm was not equal to his magnanimity" (*Ant.* 16.141). The scope and grandeur of Herod's building projects went far beyond those of any other client-king in his time; they were surpassed only by Augustus and probably equaled only by his friend Marcus Agrippa.

The king's love of Graeco-Roman culture, together with his wish to integrate his kingdom politically, socially, and culturally into the Roman Empire, also led him to establish games and build structures to house performances, competitions, races, and other types of shows. During his various campaigns across the empire—in Alexandria, the cities of Asia Minor, and several Greek islands—and on several of his visits to Rome, Herod came into contact with Hellenic culture and was exposed to a variety of competitions—those held in the Greek format and others conforming to Roman tradition. Josephus's descriptions and the archaeological finds corroborate that most of the king's energies in this and other building projects were directed toward activities in his own kingdom. However, owing to his generosity and love of sports, Herod also constructed buildings and donated monies to fund games in other cities. In Tripoli, Damascus, and Ptolemais he built gymnasia, in Cos he funded the maintenance of the annual office of the gymnasiarch, in Sidon and Damascus he built theaters, and in Olympia he bestowed a large gift to revive the games that had declined owing to a lack of monies.² Among the Herodian building projects known outside of his kingdom, which are acknowledged in literary sources alone, are the fragmentary remains of the theater in Damascus south of the city, located on the

Via Recta, not far from the temple of Jupiter that was constructed at the same time.³

In the Hellenistic East, from Alexander the Great until Pompey and down to Herod's reign, only a few buildings were erected for competitions and spectacles. Ptolemy Lagus built a hippodrome in Alexandria known as the Lageion.⁴ Malalas informs us that Quintius Marcius Rex, proconsul of Cilicia, constructed a hippodrome in Antioch from his own funds in 67 BCE, and that slightly later Julius Caesar built a theater in the city.⁵ Josephus mentions a hippodrome in Damascus in the first century BCE.⁶ These are isolated instances of buildings for mass entertainment in their early stages that had no impact whatsoever on the cultural habits of the local population or on the building patterns or architectural landscape of the cities in ancient Palestine. Herod the Great should therefore be regarded as a pioneer who introduced large-scale public spectacles and competitions into the Roman East, revolutionizing the recreational habits of the indigenous populations while setting new trends in their physical and cultural environment.

The Literary and Archaeological Evidence

Information about the celebrations that Herod inaugurated in his kingdom, the buildings he erected, and the spectacles and competitions he instituted is culled primarily from the chronicles of Flavius Josephus. A native of ancient Palestine and one of the leaders of the revolt against Rome, Josephus crossed over to the Roman side after the fall of Iotapata in 67 CE; in 70 CE he moved to Rome, where he wrote his works under Flavian rule. The archaeological remains discovered at some sites also furnish important details about Herodian construction, some corroborating the historian's accounts and others adding new information about the king's projects and efforts to expose the local population of ancient Palestine to contemporary cultural patterns. Through his activities, Herod wished to express his loyalty to the emperor, integrate his kingdom into the Roman world, and aggrandize his name among his subjects, neighbors, and patrons. An analysis of the literary evidence and

archaeological remains indicates that the king acted according to a well-thought-out program. In the course of his reign he erected a number of buildings in several locales, inaugurated celebrations in the emperor's honor in some of them, and held games in them every few years. The new cultural environment took shape and established itself over time, but only at the end of the period, with Herod's death in 4 BCE, were the scope and degree of his success to become revealed in their entirety.

Various types of spectacles and competitions were first held in a festival Herod established in Jerusalem in honor of Augustus, apparently in the spring or summer of 28 BCE. These events, which Josephus describes in detail, were held in several buildings that the king built within the city:

For in the first place he established athletic contests every fifth year in honor of Caesar, and he built a theatre in Jerusalem, and after that a very large amphitheatre in the plain, both being spectacularly lavish but foreign to Jewish custom, for the use of such buildings and the exhibition of such spectacles have not been traditional (with the Jews). Herod, however, celebrated the quinquennial festival in the most splendid way, sending notices of it to the neighboring peoples and inviting participants from the whole nation. Athletes and other classes of contestants were invited from every land, being attracted by the hope of winning the prizes offered and by the glory of victory. And the leading men in various fields were assembled, for Herod offered very great prizes not only for the winners in gymnastic games but also to those engaged in music and those who are called *thymelikoi*. And an effort was made to have all the most famous persons come to the contest. He also offered considerable gifts to drivers of four-horse and two-horse chariots and to those mounted on race-horses. And whatever costly or magnificent efforts had been made by others, all these did Herod imitate in his ambition to see his spectacle become famous. All around the theater were inscriptions concerning Caesar and trophies of the nations which he had won in war, all of them made for Herod of pure gold and silver. As for the serviceable objects, there was no valuable garment or vessel of precious stones which was not also on exhibition along the contests. There was also a supply of wild beasts, a great many lions and other animals having been brought together for him, such as were of

extraordinary strength or of very rare kinds. When the practice began of involving them in combat with one another or setting condemned men to fight against them, foreigners were astonished at the expense and at the same time entertained by the dangerous spectacle, but for the natives, it meant an open break with the customs held in honor by them. For it seems glaring impiety to throw men to wild beasts for the pleasure of other men as spectators, and it seems a further impiety to change their established ways for foreign practices. (*Ant.* 15.268–275)

Josephus reports that Herod built an impressively beautiful theater and large amphitheater in Jerusalem in which he held spectacles and competitions of various types.⁷ Except for several stone seats belonging to the theater that stood in Jerusalem (whether of Herodian or Hadrianic date), these two buildings that Herod built have not yet been discovered in the city, and opinions are divided as to their location, if at all, within the urban layout.⁸

The games in Jerusalem were established, as Josephus reports, as a quinquennial festival, held every fifth year, or every four years by our reckoning. With the dedication of Caesarea in 10 BCE, in Herod's twenty-eighth year of rule (which coincided with the 192nd Olympiad), the king also inaugurated games in that city.⁹ As in Jerusalem, he dedicated them to his patron Augustus in celebration of the emperor's victory in the battle of Actium in 31 BCE. Josephus recounts the events in Caesarea in three places. In his *War* he mentions the buildings, the competitions, and the prizes given to the participants: "The rest of the buildings—amphitheatre, theatre, public places—were constructed in a style worthy of the name which the city bore. He further instituted quinquennial games, likewise named after Caesar, and inaugurated them himself, in the hundred and ninety-second Olympiad, offering prizes of the highest value; at these games not the victors only, but also those who obtained second and third places, participated in the royal bounty" (*War* 1.415).

Along with the description of Caesarea's major projects, Josephus refers in his *Antiquities* to the buildings and their location within the city: "Herod also built a theatre of stone in the city, and on the south side of

the harbor, farther back, an amphitheatre large enough to hold a large crowd of people and conveniently situated for a view of the sea” (*Ant.* 15.341). Later in his book he elaborates on the competitions Herod held in the city upon the completion of construction:

For he announced a contest in music and athletic exercises, and had prepared a great number of gladiators and wild beasts and also horse races and the very lavish shows that are to be seen at Rome and in the various other places. And this contest too he dedicated to Caesar, having arranged to celebrate it every fifth year. And Caesar, adding luster to his love and glory, from his own revenues sent all equipments needed for such games. On her own account Caesar’s wife Julia sent many of her greatest treasures from Rome, so that the entire sum was reckoned as no less than five hundred talents.” (*Ant.* 16.137–140)

The games and competitions held in honor of Augustus in Caesarea were organized in a format similar to the one in Jerusalem, every four years; however, in Caesarea there were also gladiatorial combats and, as Josephus notes, prizes awarded not only to the winners but also to those who finished in second and third places.

In Caesarea, remains of a theater and amphitheater were uncovered on the coast south of the harbor; however, the name “amphitheater” that Josephus used does not conform to the shape of the structure discovered on that spot (Figure 1.10). This incongruity, as well as the use of various terms to define a single building in a specific place, are also repeated elsewhere in his writings. We will return to the matter of terminology after presenting all the information we have about Herod’s building projects.

The theater in Caesarea was built south of the Herodian city, on the western slope of a rocky hill of moderate height facing the sea (Figure 1.1).¹⁰ It was 90 meters in diameter and is estimated to have held about four thousand seats. Several architectural elements were detected in the preserved remains of the building—the *cavea*, *ambulatorium*, and *scaenae frons*, with a rectangular recess in its center and curvilinear

niches on either side. Semicircular and rectangular niches in the *proscenium* were later replaced by a flat façade. The *proscenium* in both phases was decorated with painted plaster, as was the floor of the orchestra, whose fourteen layers of plaster contained floral and vegetal patterns.¹¹

Between the southern end of the harbor and the area near the theater stood a monumental ten-thousand-seat hippodrome on a north-south axis, parallel to the coastline (Figures 1.2 and 1.7). The building that Josephus called an “amphitheater” was a rectangular structure (exterior measurements ca. 312×69 m) whose short southern end formed a semicircle (*sphendone*) and whose opposite end contained the starting gates (*carceres*). The rows of seats were constructed against a massive 9-meter-thick wall around the arena (300×50 m).¹² In the center of the building’s *sphendone* was a monumental gate, through which one entered the arena and from there proceeded to the seats in the *cavea*. The *cavea* had twelve rows of seats arranged in eighteen tiers (twelve of which are still preserved), with stairways (*scalaria*) running between the blocks (*cunei*). One tribunal box (*tribunal*) was built in the eastern *cavea*, in the southern third of the building. Few remains were found of the *euripus*—the barrier running down the arena that separates the two sides of the track. It seems that this feature was composed of several independent elements that stood in one line, in addition to protruding wooden or metal columns that indicated to the charioteers that they were reaching the turning points (*metae*).¹³ The *carceres* or starting gates on the northern end of the building were renovated three times during the Herodian period. They had ten stalls in addition to the monumental gate in the center.¹⁴

Josephus mentions explicitly that Jerusalem and Caesarea are the only cities in which the king erected buildings for the public events and games held once every five years. This was not the case in Jericho, where Herod had built several palaces during his reign. Only close to his death, in 4 BCE, does one first hear about two buildings in the city, but Josephus does not provide any information about them or, for that matter, about the games and contests held in them. Herod convened the Jewish officials

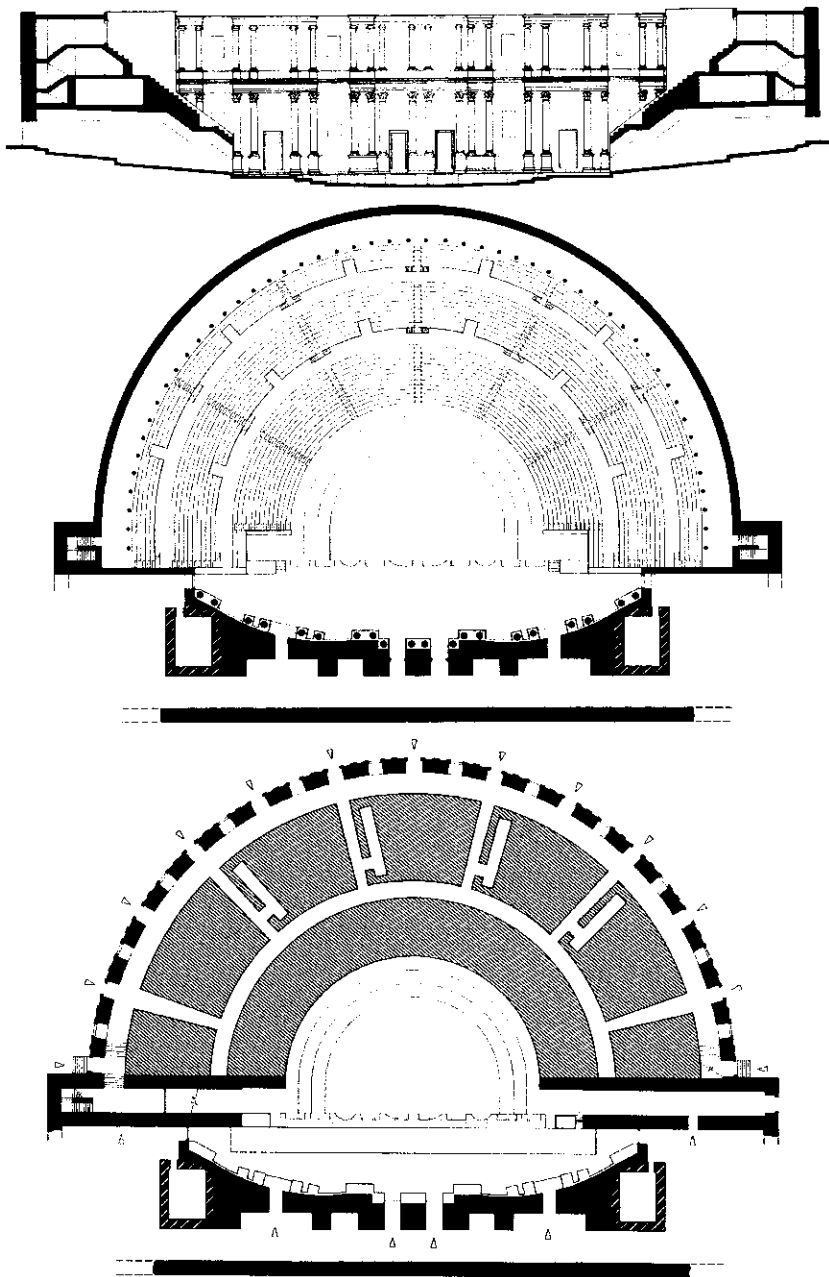


FIGURE 1.1 Caesarea, plan of the theater (reconstruction by Rachel Laureys-Chachy).



FIGURE 1.2 Caesarea, the hippo-stadium located parallel to the coastline, looking north (photo by Zeev Weiss).

in the amphitheater after the youth in Jerusalem removed the eagle from over the Temple gate, and close to his death he summoned Jewish notables to Jericho and had them shut up in the hippodrome.¹⁵ After Herod's death, Salome and her husband Alexas dismissed those who had been called to the hippodrome and assembled the soldiers in Jericho's amphitheater.¹⁶ Thus, although it emerges from Josephus's account that Jericho had two separate buildings, the archaeological finds suggest that it was actually a single multipurpose structure.

A multifunctional complex containing a hippodrome, theater, and another magnificent building—either a gymnasium or a palace—was discovered at Tell es-Samarat, north of Herod's winter palaces in Jericho and not far from that ancient city (Figures 1.3 and 1.4). The hippodrome, built on a north-south axis, was rectangular and measured approximately 315 by 82 meters. The arena had no permanent *euripus* and no built benches for sitting, but it seems to have been surrounded by colonnades

where spectators could stand or sit on portable seats during the races. A theater was built on the northern semicircular end of the hippodrome—that is, on the southern slopes of Tell es-Samarat—from where one had an excellent view of the arena and the races held in it. The theater had a diameter of about 70 meters and could hold an estimated three thousand seats. Only one wall of the *cavea* has been preserved, as well as the foundation beneath the seats and parts of the passageway between the sections of the *cavea*. The theater had no permanent stage or *scaena*, since these would have blocked the view of the spectators sitting in the *cavea* when watching the races in the arena; it seems that a temporary wooden structure was erected south of the orchestra, when needed. North of the *cavea* and adjacent to it, at the top of the tell, were the foundations of an elevated building measuring 70 by 70 meters and decorated with frescoes. The excavator of the building, the late Ehud Netzer, maintained that it had a central courtyard surrounded by columns and various-size rooms to its north. Josephus does not mention these buildings at all, and since the date of the archaeological finds is inconclusive, it is not clear in which phase Herod constructed this building—in the second decade of his reign or, as Ehud Netzer suggested, at a later date, close to the dedication of Caesarea and the celebrations then held in the city.¹⁷

In addition to his building projects for mass entertainment in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Jericho, Herod also erected similar edifices in Samaria and Herodium; these are not mentioned in Josephus's writings but were discovered in their full glory in archaeological excavations conducted at these sites. Following the battle of Actium, and after Augustus granted Herod additional territories, including Samaria, the latter decided—probably after 27 BCE—to build up the city and adorn it with diverse buildings in order to gain the favor of the local inhabitants, naming it Sebaste (Greek for “Augustus”) after the emperor. Herod initiated several building projects in the city, and although Josephus does not mention the stadium in the valley, which was enclosed by the Herodian wall in the northwestern part of the city, its construction is assigned to the king's building projects in the city at that time.¹⁸ The stadium is rectangular (205 × 67 m); a courtyard in its center (194 × 58 m) is surrounded



FIGURE 1.3 Aerial view from the northwest of the multifunctional complex in Jericho. On the tell in the foreground: remains of the gymnasium or palace, the theater on its southern slope, and the hippodrome's racecourse in the cultivated area (courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society, following Ehud Netzer, *Hasmonean and Herodian Palaces at Jericho: Final Reports of the 1973–1987 Excavations*, vol. 2, *Stratigraphy and Architecture: The Coins* [Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2004], pl. XII).

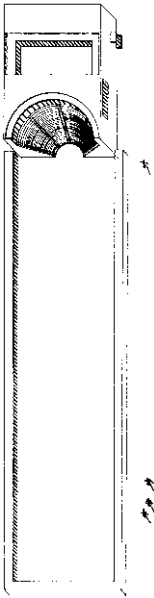


FIGURE 1.4 Reconstruction of the multifunctional complex in Jericho (courtesy of Rachel Laureys-Chachy).

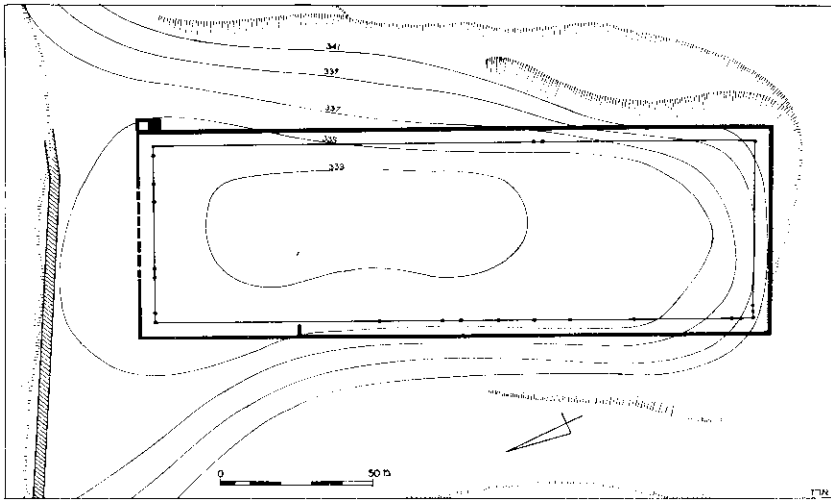


FIGURE 1.5 Samaria, plan of the stadium (courtesy of Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem).

on all four sides by colonnades with Doric-style columns, and its rear walls, which have been preserved in the south, were decorated with frescoes (Figure 1.5).¹⁹ The panels, scored with crude figures of boxers and wrestlers, some holding weapons, depict scenes of spectacles held in the arena. Beside them are several inscriptions in Greek with names, some of Latin origin, attesting to the provenance of some of the city's inhabitants, including military veterans. One of the inscriptions from a slightly later date, perhaps between 50 and 150 CE, asks Kore to remember for good the learned master Martialis and his friends. It emerges from this inscription that lectures were also held in the building, probably in the shade and coolness of the porticoes. The inscriptions, altars, and statues discovered in and around the stadium attest to the cultic worship of Kore, goddess of the city, perhaps already in Herod's day, when he built a temple to her in the city.²⁰

Not far from Jerusalem, a small theater was discovered in Herodium, Herod's palace-fortress and ultimate burial place (Figures 1.6 and 1.8).²¹ The building was constructed around 26 BCE; hewn partly into bedrock not far from the king's mausoleum, it measured 32 meters in diameter

and held about three to four hundred seats. The *cavea* contained twelve rows of seats divided into two horizontal blocks, the lower zone containing three *cunei* and the upper, four. At the top of the *cavea* was a colonnade with three chambers behind it. The central and most spacious one (8×7 m) was decorated with frescoes containing figurative patterns resembling those found in Campania from the twenties of the first century BCE—the proposed date of the last stage of the theater and its decoration. Viewing the performances onstage from this chamber apparently was not very easy, and it is therefore suggested that this was a royal box intended for intimate gatherings or private events of the king and his close friends. The side entrances gave access to the orchestra, and the richness of the stage building opposite the *cavea* is attested by its many architectural elements, some decorated with frescoes, discovered in the debris.

The diverse game program inaugurated by Herod, and the architectural shape of the buildings he erected, are typical of the king's projects, as we shall see below; while they indeed correspond to Josephus's varying terminology, some confusion remains with regard to the names and



FIGURE 1.6 Herodium, view of the theater from the east (courtesy of Roi Porat, Herodium Expedition).

purposes of some of the buildings. We will first clarify the terms Josephus used and to which buildings he was referring in his descriptions, and then discuss the nature of the games held within them.

Terminology and Use of Herod's Buildings

The variety of competitions and spectacles that Herod held in Jerusalem and Caesarea—athletic contests, horse and chariot races, music and stage performances, as well as displays of animal baiting and gladiatorial combats—appears to have required the construction of four different structures in each city: a stadium, a hippodrome, a theater, and an amphitheater, for the different uses respectively.²² Josephus writes that Herod apparently built a theater and an amphitheater or hippodrome—but not a stadium—in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and in all probability Jericho, although the historian does not say so explicitly. With the king's death, and in the ensuing period, Josephus mentions additional monuments that stood in Jerusalem and Caesarea that are not listed among Herod's building projects. For instance, one of the groups that took part in the riots in Jerusalem after Herod's death took shelter in the hippodrome south of the Temple Mount,²³ and Pontius Pilate met in the stadium of Caesarea with Jews from Jerusalem who pleaded with him to remove busts of the emperor that were attached to the army's standards, as such figural representations are forbidden by Jewish law.²⁴ Although the construction of the hippodrome in Jerusalem or the stadium in Caesarea are not attributed to the king, and since one cannot assign such architectural projects to any other figure at the time, the cumulative information compels us to assume that Herod was responsible for their construction as well; it is also apparent that the king needed such buildings for the various games he instituted.

Are we to accept Josephus's testimony at face value and assume that Herod erected all the buildings that the historian mentioned, or is it conceivable that he confused the names customarily used in his day and actually may have been referring to one and the same building? This question

does not apply to the theater, which he called by the accepted name for that known building, as in the case of Caesarea. The question is relevant primarily with regard to the hippodrome, stadium, and amphitheater.

It is hard to imagine that, in addition to other monuments in these cities, Herod erected three impressive buildings to house a variety of performances. These building endeavors posed an enormous financial burden even for Herod, who was known for his munificence. Furthermore, there was not enough space in each city for three such structures. The picture becomes even more complicated when the archaeological finds are compared to Josephus's descriptions. The building that was exposed on the coast of Caesarea, south of the harbor, is a hippodrome in every respect (Figure 1.7). The location of the building corresponds well to the literary description, and there is no doubt that it should be identified as the "amphitheater" that Herod built in Caesarea. For some reason, Josephus does not call it a hippodrome or even a stadium, even though he was familiar with these terms and used them in the context of a later event that occurred in the city.

As for Jericho, it may be assumed that the "hippodrome" and "amphitheater" mentioned in Josephus's works refer to the various parts of the multifunctional complex discovered in the city, north of Herod's palace. For instance, the arena in the hippodrome or stadium into which some notable Jews were herded, pending death, was indeed a suitable place to do this, just as Pilate threatened to do to the Jerusalemites and just as Vespasian later did to the people of Tarichaeae.²⁵ The soldiers who gathered in the theater (which Josephus erroneously called an amphitheater²⁶) most probably sat in the *cavea* while Salome and Alexas stood opposite them in the orchestra, reading Herod's letter aloud, just as Ptolemy did when reading the king's will to them or as Herod did when reprimanding the Jewish leaders following the removal of the eagle from the Temple.²⁷ Even if these terms do not refer to various parts of the building, Josephus was referring to one and the same building in Jericho when he called it a hippodrome and subsequently an amphitheater.

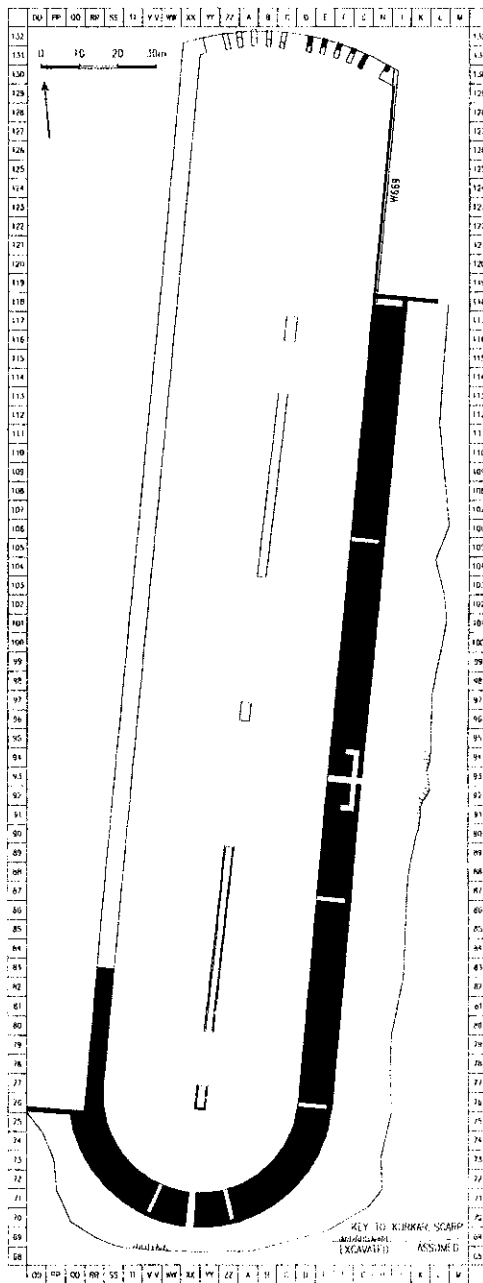


FIGURE 1.7 Caesarea, plan of the hippo-stadium (courtesy of Yosef Porath).

According to Josephus, the large amphitheater in Jerusalem was built on a plain. This detail would be entirely irrelevant even if it were assumed that this was an oval building, since any amphitheater, no matter what its size, did not need a plain, as it would have been possible to utilize the hilly area and build the *cavea* on one of the slopes or in one of the many natural dry riverbeds. In light of Jerusalem's topography, emphasizing this detail actually alludes to a building of large dimensions, like the one in Caesarea or Jericho, in which Herod's builders managed to create, with the help of massive retaining walls and some Roman construction methods, a rather long and level racetrack.

The archaeological finds indicate that Herod did not build monumental oval amphitheaters such as those found throughout the rest of the empire. It is therefore not clear why Josephus used the term "amphitheater" when describing the king's projects and to what type of building he was referring. This difficult point is belabored here not only because the king needed a specific building to hold athletic competitions and chariot races, but because a hippodrome in Caesarea was discovered on the very spot on which, according to Josephus, an amphitheater stood. Having said this, it appears that Josephus did not make any mistakes in identifying the buildings and did not confuse their names: the term "amphitheater" in his day also referred to the hippodrome or stadium, where spectators were seated around an arena.²⁸ The oval building—and the first well-known Roman amphitheater built at a distance from the Forum in the late Republic and early empire—received the Latin name *spectacula* (an abbreviation of *spectacula gladiatorum* or *spectacula gladiatorii muneris*). In describing the Herodian monuments in Caesarea and elsewhere, Josephus used the accepted terminology of his day, "amphitheater," to describe the elongated building with seats all around (that is, the hippodrome/stadium) and to distinguish it from the nearby theater, where the seats were arranged in a semicircle.

The Herodian "amphitheater," then, had the contours of a hippodrome, similar to those in Caesarea; in Jericho it was combined with a theater, and it is probable that the building in Jerusalem resembled one of the two. These buildings were actually multipurpose structures in

which athletic contests and chariot races, as well as gladiatorial combats and animal baiting, were held. Although Josephus referred to these structures by the names customarily used in his day, the term “hippodrome” would have been more accurate in defining their nature, reflecting the fact that equestrian events and athletic competitions were the major reason for their construction.²⁹ The building in Caesarea is a good example of its multiple purposes. The length of the track corresponds with what was needed for athletic competitions, and the dimensions of the building’s interior—length and especially width—were sufficient for holding chariot races. The *euripus* running down the center of the track is such that it could have been removed for running competitions, for example, while the stalls of the *carceres* were designed especially for horse and chariot races. The gladiatorial combats and animal baiting (condemning to death either animals or human beings) were also held in the arena; this is indirectly corroborated by the holes found at the top of the podium along the entire eastern *cavea*, which were meant to accommodate wooden poles supporting nets to protect the spectators from the wild animals running freely in the arena.³⁰

Several sources in talmudic literature, mainly early traditions, refer to the hippodrome/stadium as a multipurpose structure that also held amphitheatrical performances. One tannaitic law stipulates that Jews were not allowed to sell bears or lions to non-Jews for performances in the stadium.³¹ The Mishnah’s ruling, whereby bulls inclined to gore people should be put to death, made an exception with regard to bulls used in animal-baiting spectacles in the stadium.³² In the early second century, R. Nathan permitted attending gladiatorial combats in the stadium that involved Jews who were condemned to death, only because Jewish spectators “cry out in order to save the life [of the defeated] and because they may testify on behalf of a woman [whose husband was killed in the struggle] so that she may remarry.”³³ The sources at our disposal thus indicate not only that the hippodrome/stadium was a multipurpose structure, but also that such use was somewhat prevalent even after the Herodian era.

Festivals and Competitions in Herod's Day

With the construction of several monumental buildings for public entertainment throughout his kingdom, whether in his private palaces or within the urban matrix, Herod the Great succeeded significantly in changing the cultural habits of the local population. The king did not begin with one or two types of shows and then gradually add several more; rather, one gets the impression in reading Josephus that, from the outset, Herod introduced his subjects to the same public competitions and performances known elsewhere in the empire. Broadly speaking, there were four different categories of public spectacles in the Roman world—agonistic competitions, circus races, theatrical performances, and amphitheatrical shows.³⁴ While Herod featured these shows in Jerusalem and Caesarea, each had its own character, extent, and format and could be initiated and conducted on a variety of occasions. The overall nature of Herod's entire program in ancient Palestine will be discussed in this chapter, while the detailed documentation and description of the performances and competitions conducted in the centuries after the king's death, in addition to an assessment of the cultural ambience formed in the region, will be presented in their wider context in the following chapters. The discussion here will be preceded by a few remarks about the various shows, their nature, and the distinctions between them.

Every Greek city would conduct at least one festival in honor of its local deity and include a procession, a sacrifice, and agonistic contests (combat sports, races over distance, and some other competitive sports), competitions in the performing arts (music, drama, and rhetoric), and on some occasions also horse and chariot races. These were conducted at the Panhellenic games held once every four years, in accordance with the Greek tradition, at Olympia, Delphi, Isthmus, and Nemea; several other games, such as the Actian games in honor of Octavian, were added later on.³⁵ The winner of the "sacred crown games" (*agônes hieroi kai stephanitai*) received a laurel wreath or a crown. When he returned to his hometown, he was greeted by a procession (*eiselastikos*) in his honor

as well as material rewards for the honor he brought to his town. The desire of other cities to hold similar competitions in their realm engendered additional festivals and games throughout the Roman East; after receiving the emperor's approval, they gained official recognition by all the cities and, as in the first locales, featured the best available athletes. The program and the prizes at these games imitated the format of those in the large Panhellenic centers, and these cities even declared their games as Isolympic or Isopythian festivals, which were literally tantamount to the Olympic or Pythian (in Delphi) games.³⁶

Other festivals and games held elsewhere in the empire were "prize games" (*agônes thematikoî*), in which the winners were awarded money or other valuable prizes. At times attracting prime contenders, these games were held more frequently and increased in number over time.³⁷ Apart from the prize, their program was identical to that of the "sacred crown games." In these cases, the city was allowed to decide whether to limit the competitions to the local population or to invite contenders from outside the city. The games were held to commemorate a historic event, to pay tribute to kings and emperors, city gods, or even local magistrates who, upon their entrance into office, funded the games at their own expense.³⁸

In 134 CE, Hadrian proposed that the festivals be coordinated with the four-year passage of competitions on the main international circuit, so that they would not clash with the well-known festivities and other important events en route. In addition, he ordered that the crowns and moneybags at all games always be displayed openly on a table for all to see and that an imperial official check that the money was where it ought to be. Although no city from either ancient Palestine or Arabia is mentioned in Hadrian's letters, it has been suggested that the ordering of such events was administered in the greatest cities of the Roman East, while some other games were held only on a more local circuit.³⁹

Horse and particularly chariot races, popular competitions in the Roman world, were often held outside the infrastructure of civic athleticism. Most races featured the *quadriga* (a chariot harnessed to four

horses) driven by a single charioteer, but the day's program at times used the *biga* (a chariot harnessed to two horses) or *triga* (a chariot harnessed to three horses).⁴⁰ The chariots were made out of perishable materials—wood, rawhide, glue, and very little metal—in order to attain a high acceleration and maintain their speed.⁴¹ Ten or twelve chariots participated in the race, depending on the number of stalls at the hippodrome's starting gates. Several such races (varying in number from place to place) were conducted each day and continued until nightfall.

While the list of theatrical competitions held during the traditional festivals included several forms of entertainment, they also featured star soloists in several realms—poets, choral flutists, singers accompanied by lyres, performers of epic poems, and other actors. Alongside competitions in the performing arts, the Romans provided entertainment in their theaters that was pure *divertissement*. Classical comedies, tragedies, and satires were rarely staged in the Roman theater on a regular basis; instead, mimes, pantomimes, and other performances of a lighter bent were very popular in imperial Rome.⁴² Aquatic displays, such as those at the Maiuma, a Graeco-Syrian nocturnal water festival in the month of May featuring theatrical performances of dance or mime, were fashionable in several cities of the Eastern empire.⁴³

In contrast to the performances originating in the Greek world that have been described thus far, amphitheatrical shows were introduced and developed in the Latin West and were particularly popular in the Roman period.⁴⁴ They included a variety of public combats between two beasts, between beast and man, and between two men. Gladiatorial combats were a competitive show between two individuals, somewhat resembling Greek combat sports in which the winner received a monetary prize, although here blood was at times shed in the arena and the fight might end with the death of one combatant. Armed with a variety of weapons, the combatants fought each other or hunted exotic animals in the arena. These shows, just like some of the scenic performances or chariot races, were sometimes conducted in conjunction with other public performances and were intended to amuse the masses.

What types of shows, then, were held in Herod the Great's lifetime, and what was the cultural orientation that he established in ancient Palestine and that other cities initiating similar competitions and performances for the masses followed after the king's death? It becomes patently clear from Josephus's descriptions that the model for the quinquennial games held in Jerusalem and Caesarea was taken from the Greek and Roman worlds, leading Herod to create a combined event. The program of the games was based largely on the Hellenic tradition, which included athletic competitions, chariot races, and artistic performances in which, for the first time, Herod also included Roman spectacles. These were conducted in the format of *agônes thematikoi* (prize games), in which the winners were awarded money or other valuable prizes. This was customary in Jerusalem, and Josephus or his source tells us that Herod gave prizes "not only to the winners in gymnastic games but also to those engaged in music and those who are called *thymelikoi*. . . . He also offered considerable gifts to the charioteers of four-horse or two-horse chariots and to those mounted on race-horses" (*Ant.* 15.270–271).

Josephus lists the range of performances and competitions held in Jerusalem and Caesarea. Although the description regarding Jerusalem is more elaborate, it is agreed that the game program in both cities was probably similar.⁴⁵ He mentions the three categories of competitions held in the Hellenic tradition—athletic events, the performing arts, and chariot races—but provides practically no information about the types of contests corresponding to the Olympic disciplines, the ages of the contestants, and the number of participants in each group of events. The athletic competitions most probably followed the program of other Panhellenic "sacred games," wherein athletes were divided by age group—children, young boys, and adults—to compete in distance-running events, the pentathlon, wrestling, boxing, and the *pankration*.⁴⁶

Competitions for musicians and *thymelikoi* were held in the theaters of Jerusalem and Caesarea, and in other cities as well, even though Josephus does not mention them explicitly. He uses the term *thymelikoi*, but the exact nature of the competition itself is not clear, since the meaning

of this word changed over time and place. In the Hellenic era, *thymelikos agôn* referred to a musical competition, whereas in Roman times it also included dancing and stage performances.⁴⁷ Vitruvius indicates that in the Greek theater *thymelikoi* performed in the orchestra rather than on the stage, where the tragic and comic actors generally appeared.⁴⁸ However, since the orchestra in the Roman theater was partially occupied by dignitaries, the *thymelikoi*, like all other actors, performed on the stage.⁴⁹ Regarding ancient Palestine, Josephus enumerates a string of musicians and *thymelikoi*, which suggests that Herod held two types of competitions—one for musicians and another for artists performing dramatic plays; nevertheless, the historian provides no additional details regarding the nature of these shows or where exactly they took place within the theater.⁵⁰ Similar performances were included in the festivities Agrippa I held in Caesarea's theater in honor of Augustus, but Josephus places these events under the rubric of *theōriai*.⁵¹

Josephus's descriptions of the horse and chariot races are only slightly more detailed. In them he notes that Herod held two such competitions—horse races and two- or four-horse-drawn chariot races.

Herod also held amphitheatrical performances resembling those originating in the Roman world, and it seems that he was the first to include them in the Hellenic games as well.⁵² Josephus tells us that in Jerusalem “there was also a supply of wild beasts, a great many lions and other animals having been brought together for him, such as were of extraordinary strength or of very rare kinds” (*Ant.* 15.273–274). In the Jerusalem arena, animals fought with each other or with humans condemned to death, and in Caesarea there were even gladiatorial combats.⁵³ Based on other sources mentioned earlier, it appears that from the Herodian period on, not only lions but also bulls, bears, and wolves were used in similar performances held in the arenas of ancient Palestine.

The uniqueness of the Herodian games lies in the fact that, as noted, they combined two types of events. Although greater emphasis was placed on the Hellenic tradition, Roman-style gladiatorial combats and animal baiting were also included in the repertoire of performances shown in Jerusalem and Caesarea. Herod's activity seems to be the

earliest-known example of this initiative. The archaeological, epigraphical, and artistic finds from Asia Minor and Greece inform us that both amphitheatrical performances and athletic competitions became part of the imperial cult in their stadiums no earlier than the first century CE.⁵⁴ In Roman Syria, too, Malalas tells us that gladiatorial combats were included in the program of the Olympic games held in Antioch during Claudius's reign in 43/44 CE, but no earlier.⁵⁵ Thus, it seems that Herod may have been the first to introduce a new format, integrating East and West into the games he founded in Jerusalem and Caesarea, and it appears that other cities in the Roman East subsequently followed suit. Nevertheless, the "ambience which was being instantly created" by Herod the Great, to use a phrase coined by Fergus Millar, was predominantly a Greek one and, as we shall see in the following chapters, was embraced by the local population as well.⁵⁶

Tradition and Innovation in Herodian Construction

Herodian construction was characterized by creativity, daring, and innovation. It bore a local distinctiveness but was clearly eclectic, combining traditions from the Graeco-Roman East and the Western Roman Empire. The buildings Herod constructed in his palace complexes, as well as those he introduced into the urban matrix, point to the king's exceptional vision and ambition no less than his builders' ability and skill to realize his plans. These innovative trends also characterize the buildings for mass entertainment that Herod established throughout his kingdom. Using existing models, he adapted them to meet local needs, cast new components in them, combined architectural elements from other buildings, and essentially created a variation of what was known elsewhere.⁵⁷

The theaters at Herodium and Caesarea, for example, were designed, constructed, and decorated, for the most part, according to the Graeco-Roman model. However, when one examines the details at each site, the special innovative components in the Herodian structures are immedi-

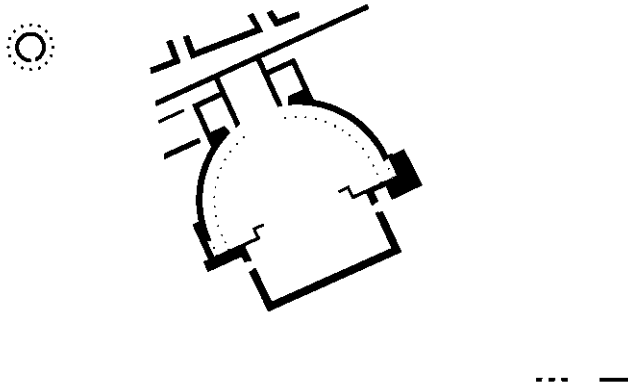


FIGURE 1.8 Herodium, plan of the theater. Note the royal box above the *cavea* (courtesy of Roi Porat, Herodium Expedition).

ately discernible from their prototype. So, for instance, the chambers added at the top of the *cavea* at Herodium had elaborately decorated walls, yet the addition of a royal box (assuming it was used for private purposes) is unknown in other theaters (Figure 1.8); architecturally, the chambers at Herodium resemble some cultic shrines (the sanctuary of Fortuna Primigenia in Palestrina, for example, as well as the theater of Pompey in Rome, and others elsewhere, mainly in the West) that were built with one or several chambers at the top of the *cavea*.⁵⁸ The design of the theater at Herodium seems to have been inspired by a similar model, perhaps the theater of Pompey that Herod may have visited when in Rome. Unlike the temple of Venus Victrix in that city, however, the comparable space at Herodium was designated for other purposes, such as the entertainment of guests before performances and resting during intermissions.

These trends find more pronounced expression in Caesarea, where the orchestra, for example, was distinctively adorned with painted

plaster, found elsewhere only in the theater of Leptis Magna that was dedicated in 1–2 CE, after Herod's death.⁵⁹ The *proscenium* was adorned with six alternating curved and rectangular niches, both wide and flat in comparison to what is known from this period or from what appears later on in the imperial theater (Figure 1.1). Moreover, the *scaenae frons* in Caesarea, decorated with architectural features worked from local stone and molded in plaster, had a unique form—a main entrance containing two doorways enclosed in a rectangular recess, and *hospitalia* framed by two curvilinear niches. This layout is unknown in any other theater, although it seems that the builders here applied several architectural principles characteristic of the Roman *scaenae frons*—the creation of depth and the breaking of the façade's linear contour with various-size niches.⁶⁰

The other structure that Herod built in his kingdom, the architectural layout of which was even more innovative and diverse, was the “amphitheater,” or, as noted, sometimes called a hippodrome or stadium. The three buildings in this category that were discovered in Samaria, Jericho, and Caesarea served similar purposes but are architecturally different from one another (Figure 1.9). The courtyard in Samaria was surrounded by a colonnade; the building in Jericho had three components; while the one in Caesarea resembled a Roman circus. The Jericho structure was unique in its dimensions and complexity but in other details resembled the stadium in Samaria. Both were rectangular without permanent benches; the colonnades around the racecourse, which seem to have existed in Jericho as well, held removable seats that were set up expressly for the races, but there were neither *carceres* nor some kind of partition separating the two sides of the track. The building in Caesarea, in contrast, had permanent seats, a *sphendone* and *carceres*, and a partition composed of several elements separating both sides of the track. All three Herodian structures were built in a relatively short span of time, and it is therefore surprising that they were quite different from each other.

Herod did not work in a vacuum when planning the buildings in his kingdom. The early Greek stadium was built in a rectangular field with earthen berms at its sides—either natural or man-made—and its narrow

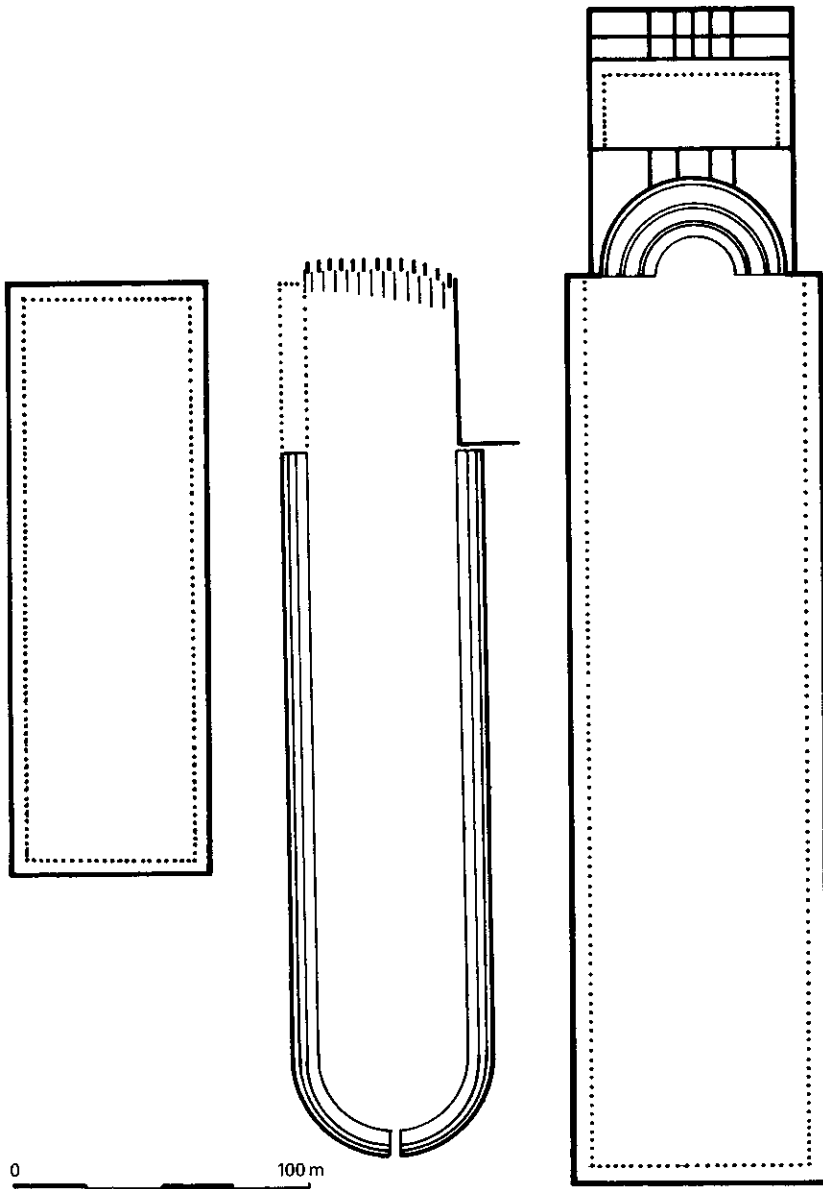


FIGURE 1.9 Buildings for mass entertainment built by Herod the Great in his realm. *Left to right*: Samaria, Caesarea, Jericho (courtesy of Rachel Laureys-Chachy).

ends sometimes took the form of an arch or curve. Under Roman rule these were usually rebuilt from stone, and permanent benches modeled after the Roman circus were added. The average length of the Greek stadium was about 200 meters (as was the length of the *stadion*—192 m, the shortest running distance), while the width of the racecourse ranged between 10 and 33 meters.⁶¹ The Roman circus, in contrast, was twice as large and had permanent seats, and while one end was curved, the other had *carceres*.

The Herodian buildings are larger than the classic stadium, especially the width of the arena, coming close but not identical to the Roman circus. The dimensions in Jericho are 82 by 315 meters, in Caesarea 69 by 312 meters, while in Samaria the slightly smaller one is 67 by 205 meters.⁶² By widening the arena to more than threefold the size of the classic stadium, it was possible to hold horse and chariot races as well as athletic competitions and amphitheatrical performances in the same building, thereby converting it into a multipurpose structure.⁶³ A temporary partition set up in the center of the arena during horse and chariot races could be removed for athletic competitions. Thus, in contrast to what existed elsewhere in the Roman world, where each building was designed to hold a specific type of competition, a solution was now found for holding all the competitions under one roof. Herod the Great's creative and innovative architectural model of the hippodrome was adopted in the following period by other cities in the region for their own horse races and athletic competitions.

A few more differences become apparent when comparing the structures in Jericho and Samaria to other contemporaneous buildings in the Mediterranean Basin. The construction of continuous colonnades around the racecourse is unknown in other stadiums, just as fresco wall decorations are unique to Samaria. The special combination in Jericho—a theater and a gymnasium or a palace adjacent to the hippodrome and probably surrounded by colonnades—also differs from the classic stadium and Roman circus. The theater in Aizanoi, Turkey, built next to a stadium, is somewhat reminiscent of the combination in Jericho, except that benches instead of colonnades were installed there, it is missing

the third component that appears in Jericho, and it was constructed later, in the mid-second century CE.⁶⁴

The colonnades surrounding the courtyard on four sides in Samaria and perhaps Jericho do not conform with what is found in other stadiums, but the architects in this case may have been inspired by the layouts of the *palaestra* and gymnasium, two building models that originated in the Greek world.⁶⁵ Contrary to Samaria, where there was one continuous colonnade, the gymnasium in Olympia (120 × 220 m) was surrounded by four Doric stoa appearing as separate units built adjacent to each side of the building. Herod contributed to the games in Olympia, visited the site in 12 BCE on his way to Rome, and was even bestowed with the honor of presiding over the games. However, this occurred only after he had erected the building in Samaria, clearly indicating that there was no connection between the two.⁶⁶ The building in Samaria is closer in shape to the gymnasium in Pergamon, where the central courtyard, although much smaller (36 × 74 m), is surrounded by one continuous peristyle.⁶⁷

Thus, it is not far off the mark to conclude that the buildings in Samaria and Jericho are the creation and innovation of Herod's builders. Here, as in the case of the theater, is an interesting blend of the basic components needed for holding competitions in each building, with additional classic elements drawn from other sources. In Samaria, the inclusion of colonnades was inspired by the *palaestra*, and its walls were decorated with paintings. In Jericho, the builders went even further, annexing a theater and a gymnasium or palace to the arena. The hippodrome in Caesarea is contemporaneous with the monuments in Samaria and Jericho, and there was apparently a similar one in Jerusalem as well. Preference for the Roman building derived from its suitability to the games held in Jerusalem and Caesarea and its assurance of comfortable seating arrangements for the spectators.

The games and the monumental buildings in which the various competitions were held were largely an expression of the urban culture in the ancient world. As mentioned, Herod established the games in Jerusalem and Caesarea and also built structures to house them in these and other

cities; at times they were situated next to his palaces, as in Caesarea and Jericho, or even on the grounds of the palace, as at Herodium. The king's design of the theater at the latter site was inspired by models of villas in Italy in the Augustan era, although the inclusion of such a structure in royal architecture was found in earlier Hellenistic palaces as well.⁶⁸

In Caesarea, Herod created a multipurpose complex that was inspired by his first two visits to Rome. Amid the entertainment complexes in southern Caesarea he constructed a palace, a hippo-stadium to its north, and a theater to its south; his palatial residence was thus visually prominent and in an appropriate relationship to the spectacles he sponsored (Figure 1.10). Herod's sources of inspiration for such a combination—which, together with his sponsoring of the games held in each building, demonstrated the ruler's munificence to his subjects—came from the large and impressive building projects whose construction had just been completed in Rome: the Opera Pompeiana on the Campus Martius and the Domus Augusti on the Palatine, as well as the Circus Maximus to the south. Kathryn L. Gleason maintains that Herod did not follow the practice of Hellenistic rulers or simply copy Roman models; rather, “he commissioned innovative projects based on his observations and discussions with Augustus and Agrippa (in Rome and in the eastern Mediterranean) about cities, architecture, landscape, and power in the early Roman Empire.”⁶⁹

The use of architectural models from various sources—the local Hasmonean kingdom, nearby estates with long Hellenistic traditions, as well as the Roman sphere—and the incorporation of diverse building components under one roof characterize Herodian architecture in general, but are even more apparent in these cases.⁷⁰ At about this time, in the transition from republic to empire, substantive changes occurred in the amphitheater and circus, and to some extent in the Roman theater—monumentalization and standardization of the buildings' architectural layout, external appearance, and interior components, which would be suitable for receiving an audience and for holding various types of performances.⁷¹



FIGURE 1.10 Caesarea, plan of the city during the reign of Herod the Great. The entertainment complex is located along the coastline, in the southern part of the city (courtesy of Kenneth G. Holm; drawings by Anna Iamim).

In conclusion, Herod, who was eager to disseminate Graeco-Roman culture and its impact throughout ancient Palestine and hoped that the local population would adopt this foreign import, invested large sums of money and great efforts in constructing buildings heretofore unknown in the region. Interested in cultural expression in both the East and West, the king founded events for mass entertainment that combined the traditions of various cultures and brought them into a region where theatrical plays, athletic competitions, and chariot races had never been held and in the confines of settlements in which monumental structures for such events had never stood. Herod's building projects are thus characterized by preliminary explorations, searching for a way to create something that had never existed in any earlier local tradition. He indeed used architectural models prevailing outside of ancient Palestine, but he also designed their interior spaces by incorporating new elements without compromising the functionality of the individual buildings. Herod, who wished to mold the leisure cultural habits of his subjects, acted in an age of transition, one in which the buildings would gradually assume a uniform shape yet would allow him to add his own personal touch to the architectural landscape developing and coalescing in his day.⁷²

Herod's Legacy in His Lifetime and after His Death

The celebrations and games Herod founded in Jerusalem and Caesarea are assumed to have continued unhampered throughout his reign, even if Flavius Josephus or his sources do not say so explicitly. The interesting questions, however, concern the reaction of the local population in light of the new cultural patterns that held sway in the country and what happened to them after the king's death: Did the games continue to be held as before? Were others like them established? Or were they terminated and the buildings destroyed and abandoned shortly after the king's demise? This last question touches on yet another issue regarding the type of building materials and the construction methods used by Herod's architects in creating these structures. While available resources and contemporary techniques undoubtedly helped shape the buildings

and the architectural impact they left on the urban infrastructure and skyline, they also demonstrated the long-term cultural impact of these projects even after Herod's death.⁷³

After examining the literary sources and archaeological finds, it becomes clear that some of the buildings continued to exist in the Herodian era or at least until 70 CE, some even later. Such was the case with regard to the stadium in Samaria, where the inscriptions and engravings added to the building's walls, perhaps between 50 and 150 CE, reinforce this conclusion. Nothing is known about the multifunctional building in Jericho, whether it continued to stand or was destroyed and went into disuse after Herod's death, after Archelaus was deposed from the throne, or perhaps only after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE. The theater at Herodium, for its part, was intentionally covered with soil fills in Herod's day, consequently creating an artificial conical hill.

In contrast, the theater and hippo-stadium in Caesarea remained standing, indicating that performances continued to be held throughout this period. The stage and the orchestra in the theater were renovated, and the *carceres* in the hippo-stadium were redesigned several times in the course of the first century CE. Pontius Pilate met with Jews in the stadium of Caesarea, presumably in the municipal hippo-stadium; Agrippa died in late 43 or 44 CE when attending the theater in Caesarea for the festivities held in honor of Augustus;⁷⁴ and on October 24, 70 CE, Titus threw many Jewish captives into the arena during the games held in honor of his brother Domitian's birthday. Some of these prisoners were devoured by fierce animals, several were burned, and others died in mortal combat.⁷⁵ The hippo-stadium was the only building in the city that could have housed spectacles of this sort.

The picture regarding Jerusalem, where Herod conducted his first project, becomes even more obscure not only because remains of the buildings have not yet been discovered there, but also because some scholars have doubts as to the type of building materials (permanent stone structures or temporary wooden ones) the king used when constructing the theater and "amphitheater" in the city. Josephus describes the games and mentions the buildings in Jerusalem by name only in his

Antiquities. He also mentions the hippodrome during the events that took place in the city after Herod's death in both *War* and *Antiquities*. The historian does not write about these buildings anywhere else—neither in outlining the topography of the city, recounting the events of the first century, nor in connection with the Great Revolt. Jan Van Henten maintains that the games Herod inaugurated in Jerusalem were a complete failure. The king was forced to move them to Samaria and later to Caesarea, and for this reason they found no expression in the city, neither in his day nor after his death.⁷⁶

In light of the fact that not a single remnant of such buildings has been discovered to date in Jerusalem, it has been suggested that they were built of wood expressly for the games and subsequently dismantled every year. This suggestion is corroborated by several pieces of evidence. Josephus, for example, emphasized that the theater in Caesarea was built of stone; however, this detail would apparently be irrelevant if the building in Jerusalem had been similarly constructed. Some theaters and amphitheaters in Rome were made of wood, and it is possible, according to Joseph Patrich, that a Roman model served as Herod's source of inspiration for his first building projects in Jerusalem. Another piece of corroborative evidence appears in the account of the silver and gold trophies that Herod placed in the theater. The Jerusalemites perceived them to be statues and the king ordered that they be removed, leaving only the bare wood beneath them. If the theater had been built of stone, then it would have been adorned with reliefs made of suitable materials. Placing the standards inside the building also alludes to the fact that the theater and perhaps also the amphitheater in Jerusalem were constructed of wood.⁷⁷ Josephus informs us that Agrippa I later donated a theater in Berytus and that his son Agrippa II seems to have followed suit. If the edifice had been made of stone, then it is not clear, Achim Lichtenberger opines, why a father and son could have donated two identical buildings in such a short span of time; he thus concludes that the first building was made of wood, was completely dismantled at the end of the celebrations, and then rebuilt a few years later by Agrippa II for the games held in his day.⁷⁸

However, contrary to the assumption that the buildings in Jerusalem were simply made of wood, it may be argued that these were actually permanent stone structures. Herod's building projects are characterized by their imposing monumentality and meticulous planning, which required a great deal of forethought; Roman building methods were applied, and a variety of building materials were used, some of which were brought from great distances. The king's impressive achievements became renowned from afar and are revealed in their full glory in his palaces in Jericho, Herodium, and Masada, as well as in his urban and religious buildings in Jerusalem, Samaria, and Caesarea. Construction in hewn stone is common in Herodian architecture as was the use of varying quantities of Roman cement, arches, vaults, domes, and architectural ornamentation. The buildings' walls and floors were decorated with frescoes, mosaics, and marble inlays known from the Roman world. Such building materials and techniques were also implemented in the buildings for mass entertainment that the king erected during his reign.⁷⁹ All structures excavated thus far were built of stone, and most of them of hewn stone; bricks were also used, but only in Jericho, as this was a common building material in that region. The foundation of the *cavea* on which the seats were placed was made of cement (Jericho, Caesarea), and wherever necessary arches and vaults were constructed (Caesarea, Herodium) and adorned with architectural decorations (Samaria and Caesarea) or frescoes set either in the orchestra (Caesarea) or on walls (Samaria and Herodium). Why, then, would Herod build a theater and "amphitheater" of wood in Jerusalem, the city in which he invested great efforts in its construction and institutions? Such a suggestion runs counter to the king's love of monumentality reflected in his other ambitious projects.

Generally speaking, a comparative reading of Josephus's *War* and *Antiquities* is essential, but one wonders whether there is any significance in the fact that the games in Jerusalem are mentioned in one book and not in the other; perhaps Josephus accorded more importance to some institutions in the city than to others; or, alternatively, he may have indicated the stone construction of a theater in Caesarea but remained

silent regarding the building materials used in Jerusalem. The long and detailed account of the games in Jerusalem in his *Antiquities*, composed in his latter years, befits the character of the book, in which he describes the chronological development of events. This stands in contrast to *War*, where Josephus's account of the events in the first part serves as a short and useful introduction to the main subject to which the entire book is devoted. Josephus indeed mentions the games in Jerusalem only once, but the hippodrome—which, as noted, is the amphitheater that Herod built in the city—is mentioned in *Antiquities* and *War*, in the description of the events following the king's death. If Josephus's description is reliable, then his narrative would seem to indicate that the hippodrome was a permanent building that stood even after Herod's death.

The uniqueness of the theater in Caesarea vis-à-vis the one in Jerusalem lies in the fact that it was built *ek petras* (= out of stone), as Josephus wrote (*Ant.* 15.341); however, the proposed translation into English is not precise and certainly ignores the physical reality. The theater was indeed built of stone, but this was not Josephus's intention by this phrase,⁸⁰ as we would then have to conclude that the historian ignored the fact that the nearby “amphitheater,” mentioned in the same breath as the theater, was also built of stone—and such an argument is hardly tenable. Moreover, it should be noted that Josephus did not write (as that interpretation would lead us to expect) that the theater was built *ek lithôn* (out of stones)—the phrasing he used for that purpose.⁸¹ Rather, he wrote that the theater was built *ek petras*, out of “stone,” in the singular.

To understand what “out of stone” might mean, we must recall that Herodian Caesarea lies on a plain on which there are two prominent but not very high hills, one north of the city, near the port, and one south of the city. Among the houses near the port, “in the circle around the harbor was a mount,” as Josephus describes, “upon which Herod constructed a temple in honor of Rome and Caesar, visible a great way off to those sailing into the harbor” (*Ant.* 15.339). The theater, in contrast, was built on the western slope of the southern hill and was designed to accommodate the construction of the *cavea* (Figure 1.1). Josephus was precise in his words, noting that the Herodian theater, not the amphitheater,

was built out of [the] rock (*ek petras*), meaning that it was built, even partially, into the quarried hill located south of the city. The translation “built out of [the] rock,” is therefore preferable because Josephus used *petra* and not *lithos*, in the singular and not the plural.⁸² Here, as in the temple to Roma and Augustus, he describes faithfully the king’s projects against the background of the city’s topographical reality, noting also that the “amphitheater” lies in a place that facilitated a view of the sea.

The comparison between Jerusalem and Caesarea, therefore, does not concern only the building materials used for constructing the theaters in these cities, but also the nature of the engineering project in one as opposed to the other. In Caesarea, which is located on a plain, it was important to specify this feature, whereas in Jerusalem, which is characterized by a hilly terrain, it was unnecessary to mention it. In light of Jerusalem’s mountainous contours, it is clear why Josephus deemed it necessary to emphasize that the “amphitheater” was built on a plain, so as to contrast it with Caesarea, where a similar building was built years later.⁸³ Josephus or his sources wished to aggrandize the king’s projects by providing various details, including topographical ones that would lend a unique character to each building.

Nor does the absence of archaeological finds constitute proof that the building was made of wood and therefore did not leave remains at the site. A similar solution was proposed in the past for the “amphitheater” in Caesarea and the theater in Herodium, but today, after exposing both of these buildings, it has become patently clear that this theory is erroneous.⁸⁴ Construction from wood was indeed known in Rome in Herod’s day, but, as Frank Sear remarks, this was, in fact, a unique phenomenon in the capital: “the evidence of permanent theaters in the rest of Italy at this time shows that in building wooden theaters Rome was the exception rather than the rule.”⁸⁵ Stone, as opposed to wood, was more accessible in the Roman East; local builders who were trained to work with this material could construct buildings of various types and shapes, even on the difficult terrain of Jerusalem. Herod’s rapport with Rome is well known, but it is not clear why the king would prefer to build the theater—a Greek institution for all intents and purposes—based expressly

on the Roman model, using wood instead of the permanent stone construction common in the East (Greece and Asia Minor) and with which he and certainly his architects and builders were proficient. At about the same time, Herod built the theater in Herodium, the stadium in Samaria, and the multifunctional complex in Jericho out of stone (assuming that the latter building was constructed in the second decade of his reign). If the king had indeed built permanent structures from stone in Samaria, Herodium, and Jericho, and decorated them in good taste, why, then, did he not erect a similar building in Jerusalem, where he founded the games in honor of Augustus and in which he invested large sums of money and great efforts?

For these same reasons one must reject the supposition that Agrippa I, and later his son, built theaters out of wood in Berytus. The reasonable assumption would be that Agrippa gave the city a theater made from stone that was renovated or expanded later on with the funds of Agrippa II. Such activities, to be discussed in the following chapters, are well documented for other buildings in ancient Palestine.

The removal of the ornaments above the trophies and the exposure of the bare wood do not say much about the physical nature of the building, except for the fact that they were meant to adorn the theater's interior.⁸⁶ Trophies were originally memorials of specific military victories over an enemy. They were built from a tree trunk or a wooden pale and crossbar covered with a torso symbolizing a defeated enemy soldier and on which additional weapons—a sword, a spear, a shield, and a helmet—were placed.⁸⁷ The trophy usually had an anthropomorphic look, with outlines resembling human beings although lacking a head, hands, or legs. The trophies symbolizing Augustus's victories over many nations were placed in the theater, except Josephus failed to mention their number or exact location inside the building. Herod offended the Jews by introducing what appear to be statues into their city, but the Jews, following the king's orders to remove the ornaments, realized that the trophies were only wooden and not human figures. Trophies representing the fourteen nations Pompey defeated during his campaign in the East were placed together with the inscriptions in the first permanent theater he erected in 55 BCE in Rome on the Campus Martius, which he dedi-

cated to Venus the Victorious.⁸⁸ During Herod's first visit to Rome in 40 BCE, he most probably visited this imposing stone monument, where he saw the trophies glorifying the triumphs of the commander.⁸⁹ Elsewhere, statues or painted wooden panels, mostly of the emperor and his family, were sometimes carried to the theater in processions and, like the trophies in Jerusalem, were placed inside the building. The diversity of these objects, made of degradable materials, was meant to adorn the building, but primarily to express loyalty to Rome, the emperor, and his rule over the empire, as Herod did in the theater that he built in Jerusalem.⁹⁰

In this light, it may be concluded that the buildings Herod constructed in Jerusalem were permanent stone structures built by the same techniques he subsequently used for his monuments in Herodium, Samaria, Jericho, and Caesarea.⁹¹ However, since the games are not mentioned anywhere else, it is doubtful that they were still kept in the city after the king's death or even after Archelaus was deposed in 6 CE. The celebrations and games inevitably ended shortly afterward, as the principal entrepreneur and benefactor no longer existed (and who, as we shall see in Chapter 4, was a crucial figure for holding games). Public spectacles in first-century Jerusalem centered on the Temple, and not the city's theater or circus.⁹²

In conclusion, the buildings and performances in Caesarea, Samaria, and perhaps even Jericho continued to exist with local support and even served as a model for structures built later on, in early first-century Palestine and its vicinity. The first phase of the theater excavated in Tiberias is attributed to Herod Antipas, who founded the city in 19 CE as the capital of his kingdom (Figure 6.4). The building facing north is located adjacent to and west of the *cardo*, leading from the Herodian city gate into the city center.⁹³ Public gatherings during the Great Revolt against Rome were held in the hippodrome in Tarichaeae and the stadium in Tiberias, probably also built by Herod Antipas in the early first century CE.⁹⁴ By constructing the stadium in Tiberias, the remains of which were unearthed along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, some 200 meters northeast of Roman Tiberias's city center, Herod Antipas actually followed in his father's footsteps when building the hippo-stadium in Caesarea.⁹⁵ Both structures are located near a shore, are built on a north-south axis, and



FIGURE 1.11 View of the semicircular southern wall (*sphendone*) of the stadium in Tiberias. The parallel walls above this curved one belong to a vault built in the Byzantine period that continued to be used in the Umayyad period (courtesy of Moshe Hartal, Israel Antiquities Authority).

are curved at the southern end (*sphendone*) of the building; the building materials and construction methods are similar in both as well. The stadium in Tiberias, as in Caesarea, is built of hewn stones, and the blocks of seats were built at both sites on massive walls measuring about 9 meters thick, and not on the customary vaults found in many other hippodromes (Figure 1.11). The length of the stadium in Tiberias is unknown, but it is clear that the building was narrow (39 m wide) compared to the one in Caesarea (69 m wide). The differences in the dimensions of the



FIGURE 1.12 Petra, general view of the theater (courtesy of Zbigniew Fiema).

two may indicate that the stadium in Tiberias was intended for athletic competitions, while the one in Caesarea, because of its width, also could have been used for horse races.

Similar beginnings, albeit on a limited scale, were known in the first century CE in the neighboring Nabataean kingdom and in the autonomous prosperous cities of ancient Palestine and the Decapolis. A large-size theater was built in Petra in the first half of the first century CE (Figure 1.12), in all probability during the reign of Aretas IV (9 BCE–40 CE),⁹⁶ and a late first-century BCE date has been suggested for the theater in Canatha.⁹⁷ The southern theater in Scythopolis and the northern building in Gadara were also founded around this time, and it is probable that there was a theater in Ascalon as well in the first half of the first century CE.⁹⁸ Several tannaitic sources from the first and early second centuries CE, some of which were mentioned earlier, also refer to a number of performances held in the municipal hippo-stadium—what is referred to in rabbinic literature as the stadium or *campon*.⁹⁹

Herod's magnificent building projects in late first-century BCE Palestine testify to the king's marked impact on the region. His introduction of new cultural patterns was undoubtedly adopted by pagan citizens living in other major cities; his building activity also influenced others who subsequently introduced similar public spectacles and competitions into their own realms. The absence of a funding agent (see Chap. 2) led to a slowdown in the construction of such buildings and in holding games in the cities of first-century CE Palestine. However, after the suppression of the Great Revolt in 70 CE, and with the reinforcement of the municipal leadership following years of royal dynasties, construction gained a renewed momentum that significantly changed the leisure cultural habits of local society.

Such was not the case vis-à-vis the Jewish population, for whom the new situation was more complex. Jewish opposition to Herod's activities was pointed directly at him in the early years of his reign in reaction to his building projects and the introduction of competitions in Jerusalem. Josephus's description of the events in the city, that "to the natives it meant an open break with the customs held in honor by them" (*Ant.* 15.274–276), explains the resistance to the competitions on three different levels:¹⁰⁰ throwing humans to beasts for the enjoyment of others was reproachable;¹⁰¹ replacing the ancestral laws with foreign customs was considered an explicit transgression; and, more than anything, the Jews objected vehemently to the trophies Herod placed in the theater, which they believed to be statues and considered a blatant violation of the Second Commandment. Even after removal of the ornamentation above the statue-like trophies, and even though most Jews were ready to adapt their tastes so as not to anger the king, some of them, as Josephus states, "persisted in their resentment of these practices as departures from traditions and in the belief that the violation of the customs of their country would be the beginning of great evils" (*Ant.* 15.281).

The "ancestral customs" of the Jews, a term used by Josephus when beginning his account of Herod's initiative in Jerusalem (*Ant.* 15.267), is a container phrase the historian uses when referring to the Jewish people's traditional way of life, formed mostly by their laws. In

constructing Roman public spectacles in Jerusalem, in the shadow of the Temple, Herod violated the ancestral laws “You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not follow their statutes. My ordinances you shall observe and my statutes you shall keep, following them” (Lev. 18:3–4). A tannaitic source interprets the foreign practices referred to in Leviticus 18:3 (“and you shall not follow their statutes”) as follows: “‘You should not follow the ways of the nations in the matters of their laws, such as theaters, circuses, and stadiums.’ R. Meir says: ‘These are the ways of the Amorite whom the rabbis have specified.’”¹⁰² Attending Roman public spectacles, as far as R. Meir was concerned, was to conduct oneself in the ways of the Amorites—one of the nations that inhabited Canaan before the formation of Israel—and was forbidden, as it was a foreign custom to be avoided. If we consider the explanation given by the *tannaim*, then the Jews, as Josephus leads us to believe, viewed the competitions and other performances as incongruous with Jewish values and laws, and therefore completely unacceptable.

For the same reasons, Simon, known for his stringent observance of the commandments, later on asked Agrippa I not to enter the Temple since it was his custom to go to the theater in Caesarea. Agrippa invited Simon to the theater, sat him down beside him, and asked, “What is contrary to the law in what is going on here?” Simon, who had nothing to say against the activities held in the theater, “begged his pardon.”¹⁰³ Josephus does not state explicitly who in Jerusalem objected to public spectacles and competitions in Herod’s day, but the reasons he mentioned for their objection resemble some of those expressed later on by the rabbis who forbade attending the theaters and circuses—not only because of idolatry, but also because the activities at both venues were immoral (see Chap. 5). The theatrical performances, they believed, were arenas of rowdiness, vulgarity, lewdness, and pornography, and were not a proper setting for Jews.

Relying on the available sources, it is difficult to determine whether the Jews of ancient Palestine attended the games in the Herodian period.

Was the criticism aired in Jerusalem at all representative of the Jewish population at large? Did it express the voice of the Jerusalemites who objected to the foreign competitions that Herod instituted in the shadow of the Temple in honor of the emperor? Or perhaps it represented the attitude expressed by Josephus or the sources at his disposal?¹⁰⁴ The daily contact and tension of the largely rural Jewish populace with the new sociocultural order in the Herodian period, as illustrated by the few available sources, were minimal. First-century CE religious leaders did not take a stand either for or against the effects of the budding new culture that was gaining ground throughout the country. Even if some Jews in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Tiberias attended performances at this time, this was not the widespread social phenomenon of the ensuing centuries.¹⁰⁵

Herod's building projects in ancient Palestine effected dramatic changes in the recreational habits of the local populations throughout the region. The number of such edifices as well as their cultural and architectural impact increased gradually in the late first and following centuries CE, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 2. The king acted creatively and innovatively when introducing new leisure activities into his kingdom, as he did with his other building endeavors, incorporating architectural and artistic traditions from both the East and West—from both the Hellenistic world and the Roman sphere.

The games are yet another example of how the Roman legacy influenced popular culture in ancient Palestine. This trend is apparent in other realms as well—architecture, art, the army, economic policy, and even education.¹⁰⁶ Herod's choice to follow Roman customs is the result of deliberate and well-calculated decisions. The establishment of a cult to the emperor and games in his honor convey Herod's clear agenda and symbolize—not only for the inhabitants of the Hellenistic cities but also for the Jews—his loyalty to Rome and its leader and his desire to be a pioneer in adopting the latest trends prevailing in the empire's capital.

Herod's massive building activities left a long-lasting imprint on the region; his dream of integrating Palestine culturally into the wider Roman Empire so as to transform it into a Roman enclave succeeded far beyond his rule and the bounds of his kingdom. While the first period is characterized by preliminary explorations, new beginnings that were projected onto the shape of the buildings, the nature of the games, and even the terminology used in them, from the end of the first century CE and into the second and third, the architectural and cultural traditions in ancient Palestine took shape and gained a relatively uniform appearance throughout the region.

2

Shaping the City's Landscape: Buildings for Mass Entertainment in Their Urban Context

THE INTRODUCTION OF buildings for mass entertainment—the theater, hippodrome, and amphitheater—along with other monumental buildings, reshaped the urban landscape of the cities of ancient Palestine. Their splendor could be seen from afar, and their massive presence could be felt by all who walked past them on the main streets of the city. Built over a period of three hundred years, these monumental buildings undoubtedly served as a source of pride for the local inhabitants and had a significant impact on their daily life; however, none of the available literary and material evidence informs us about what transpired in these cities or how the inhabitants reacted to such changes in the first centuries CE. Rather, it is the buildings themselves—and the direct or indirect evidence about them—that shed light on the nature of the changes effected in each and every place and allow one to assess the impression these edifices left on the local inhabitants and visitors to the city.

While some of these buildings were fully excavated and others only partially, a few have come to our attention from surveys or aerial photographs. This information complements the historical and epigraphical material testifying to the existence of other structures in locales for which there is no archaeological evidence.

The buildings for mass entertainment throughout the Roman world created a common cultural vocabulary that united its diverse peoples, and attending the various performances was a mark of one's participation in urban Graeco-Roman culture. By clarifying the precise number of buildings in the region at the height of the third century CE and evaluating the relative pace at which each of the structures was built, from the Herodian period until the third century CE, and by examining the location of each edifice in its urban context and defining its physical appearance, this chapter proposes to show how the architectural landscape of the city in ancient Palestine was shaped, how it affected each locale, and what can be learned about the cultural predilections of the local pagan and Jewish populations. Doing so will enable us to draw important conclusions regarding the acculturative effect of Graeco-Roman public spectacles and competitions on the local communities of ancient Palestine while gaining invaluable insights into the process of "adopting a novelty" in the region after the death of Herod the Great.

The Distribution of the Buildings in Ancient Palestine

Theaters, the most common structures in ancient Palestine, were found at over thirty sites throughout the region. In light of references to such edifices in the literary and epigraphical sources, as well as to the fact that some cities probably had more than one such building, the total number of theaters in the region must have been even greater (Figure 2.1).

Theaters have been exposed in the following cities of ancient western Palestine: Caesarea (2), Shuni-Maiumas, Dor, Antipatris, Tiberias, Sephoris, Neapolis, Samaria, Scythopolis (3), and Jericho.¹ The Egyptian official Theophanes, who returned from a campaign in Antioch via Palestine in the early fourth century CE, tells us that Ascalon had a theater and an *odeon* (the latter having been partially excavated in recent years),² and there is no doubt that a theater existed in Gaza, Ascalon's southern neighbor and a stronghold of paganism in ancient Palestine.³ A relief of a man looking at a mask he is holding adorns the stone door of a burial tomb in Jaffa and possibly alludes to a theater performer who was in-

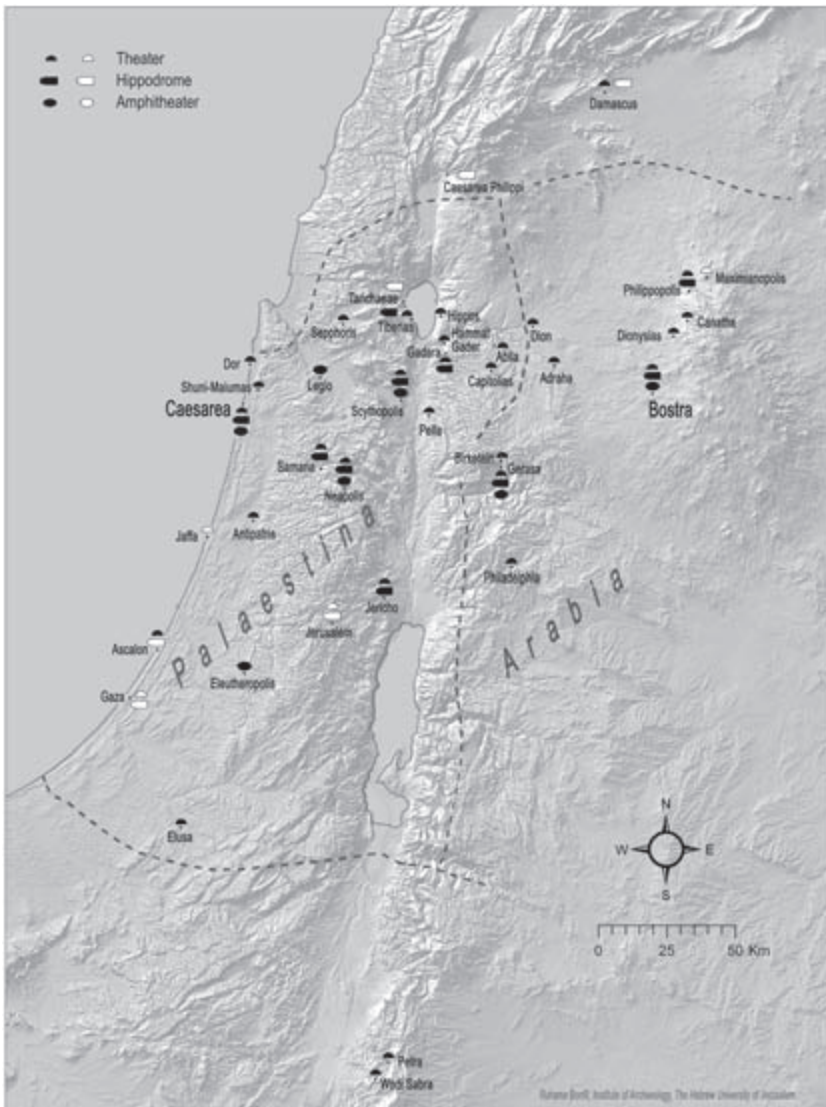


FIGURE 2.1 Distribution of buildings for mass entertainment in ancient Palestine and Arabia in light of the archaeological evidence (in black) and literary and other sources (in white) (graphics by Ruhama Bonfil).

tered there; it may possibly attest, though indirectly, to the existence of a theater in the city.⁴ A number of stone seats from a theater incorporated in secondary use into the walls of the Umayyad palace in Jerusalem indicate the existence of a nearby building, although it is not clear whether the seats belonged to a Herodian theater or to one built by Hadrian in Aelia Capitolina, as mentioned in the seventh-century CE *Chronikon Paschale*.⁵

Theaters were discovered in most of the cities of the Decapolis in Transjordan: Hippos, Gadara (2), and nearby Ḥammad Gader, Abila, Capitolias, Pella, Dion, Gerasa (2), and nearby Birketein, Philadelphia (2), Canatha, and Damascus.⁶ Outside the Decapolis there were theaters in Bostra, Philippopolis, Adraha, and Dionysias, as well as Maximianpolis (Shaqqa), where an inscription attests to an as yet undiscovered theater.⁷ The theaters built in the Nabataean kingdom include Petra (two structures, and a third incorporated into the temple), Sabra, Elusa, and one in the ritual/cultic district of Sahr.⁸

The hippodrome, sometimes also called a stadium, was used in Palestine in Herod's day and in the first centuries CE for both chariot races and athletic competitions; this was done in the spirit of the popular tradition in the East and contrary to that in Rome and the western provinces of the empire, where there was a complete separation between these events.⁹ Hippodromes and *stadia* have been discovered to date at nine sites: seven were hippodromes—in Caesarea (2), Neapolis, Scythopolis, and Jericho in ancient western Palestine; in Gerasa and Gadara in the Decapolis; and in Bostra in Arabia; and two were *stadia*—in Tiberias and Samaria.¹⁰ The archaeological survey indicates that a hippodrome probably stood in Hippos, and the written sources attest to the existence of several more structures in other cities.¹¹ According to Flavius Josephus, Jerusalem and Tarichaeae each had a hippodrome.¹² Athletic competitions were conducted in second-century Damascus, but it is doubtful whether they were held in the hippodrome that Josephus tells us stood in that city in the first century BCE.¹³ Isolympic games were held in Gaza in the mid-third century CE, and one hundred years later the city was renowned for its excellent *pammacharii* (combatants specializing in

a kind of freestyle wrestling).¹⁴ Gaza also held chariot races in a hippodrome that seems to have been built in the Roman period.¹⁵ Ascalon probably also had a similar structure in which athletic competitions were held in the early third century CE and which was known particularly for its fine wrestlers in the fourth century CE.¹⁶ A lead weight discovered in Ascalon depicting a rider may allude to the existence of chariot races in this city, too.¹⁷ Athletic competitions, including running, conducted in Caesarea Philippi (Paneas) indicate that such a building existed in this city.¹⁸

Oval amphitheaters based on the Roman model were found in only four cities in the region—three in western Palestine (Caesarea Maritima, Eleutheropolis, and Legio/Lajjun) and one, only partially excavated, in Bostra, the capital of Arabia.¹⁹ In Neapolis, Caesarea, and Scythopolis, and probably also Gerasa in the Decapolis, the hippodrome, which was no longer in use, was converted at some stage into an amphitheater (see below for discussion of the amphitheater).²⁰ Other than the orchestra in the northern theater at Gadara in the Decapolis, which was converted into an oval arena in the early fourth century CE, no other theaters in the region display such changes.²¹ Of those buildings, only in Neapolis and Caesarea was evidence found for the existence of gladiatorial combats and animal baiting in the Roman tradition, while in other cities the performances bore a character more suited to the cultural influence of late antiquity. In contrast to the theater and hippodrome, no evidence has been found for the existence of amphitheaters elsewhere, apart from Josephus's reference to those structures built by Herod the Great in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Jericho, and by Agrippa I in Berytus (see Chap. 1).

Judging by the number of theaters in ancient Palestine, it appears that theatrical performances were very popular in the region from Herod's reign until the third century CE. Compared to other structures, the overall number of theaters is especially large, and their distribution throughout the region is wide and fairly uniform; the resultant cultural impact is therefore very significant. Theatrical performances were held not only in the major cities and administrative or governmental centers, but also in some marginal *poleis*, far from the cultural and societal hubs of ancient

Palestine. Some large cities had at least two theaters each, one large and one small, and in others a single building, with dimensions varying from place to place. It is thus probable that other cities having a Graeco-Roman orientation, such as Ptolemais, Diospolis, and Eleutheropolis, built theaters whose location cannot be traced today. Relying solely on archaeological data, the number of theaters in Transjordan is actually larger and they are also better preserved archaeologically than those in western Palestine; nevertheless, were we to add the historical data to the archaeological finds, we would find that the distribution of theaters in both areas is almost identical.

The hippodrome or stadium existed in only a few large cities in ancient Palestine; the distribution of such buildings over the region is rather homogeneous, somewhat similar to that of the theater. The historical and epigraphical evidence for the existence of athletic competitions and chariot races, mentioned earlier, together with the archaeological finds, suggests that there were more hippodromes and *stadia* in the region than have been discovered, although their overall number is smaller when compared to the theaters. This statistic does not imply that chariot races or athletic competitions were less popular in ancient Palestine, nor does it tell us anything about the cultural proclivities of its local population. Rather, it appears that funds for the construction and ongoing maintenance of the hippodrome and stadium, as well as for holding shows and erecting other public buildings, went well beyond the financial means of most cities in Roman Palestine.

The number of amphitheaters in the region is markedly small; moreover, their distribution over space and their comparative numbers between Palestine and Transjordan stand in complete opposition to what is generally known about the theaters and hippodromes. Amphitheaters have been discovered at three sites in western Palestine, while only one building has been discovered to date in Transjordan. The numeric proportion between the two regions is also preserved when considering the number of hippodromes that were converted into amphitheaters. It should not be assumed that the excavation of sites with such buildings has been exhausted, especially in Transjordan, where many have already

been preserved, including those designated for mass entertainment; to date, however, another amphitheater has not been discovered among them. Furthermore, no inscriptions from these regions mention an amphitheater, its performances, or participants in its events, and spectacles find only poor expression in the local art; this stands in contrast to the wealth of epigraphical remains and art found, for example, in the Hellenistic cities of Asia Minor. The nearly complete absence of these finds in the region demonstrates that the inhabitants of ancient Palestine did not entirely embrace this foreign culture, and it may explain the considerably small number of these buildings in comparison to others.

The city's financial burden of covering the costs of constructing a monumental amphitheater and the ongoing support of performances held in it may explain, as in the case of the hippodrome, the small number of these buildings in the region in comparison to theaters. There seem to have been additional factors involved here as well. The absence of oval amphitheaters from the first century CE may indicate that the inhabitants of ancient Palestine initially rejected the brutal exhibitions in these buildings, as they were foreign to their oriental cultural heritage; this, of course, does not include those performances having a distinct Roman orientation that were held in the Herodian hippo-stadia and endorsed by the king. The establishment of oval amphitheaters in ancient Palestine in the second century CE and on seems to attest to a change in the cultural tastes of the local community.

Oval buildings were now constructed in only a few cities, apparently those boasting a marked Roman presence.²² The desire to watch amphitheatrical performances and the initiative taken to build a suitable monumental building for this purpose were not necessarily linked to the indigenous population, Jews and non-Jews alike, but were intended to answer the needs of the growing Roman population that had established itself in the region. The renewed organization of *Provincia Palaestina*, the presence of Roman officials and military veterans in the large cities, and the permanent settlement of two Roman legions and many auxiliary forces in the province after the suppression of the Bar-Kokhba revolt perhaps better explain the sweep of building activity of amphitheaters in

our region.²³ Over twice the number of Roman soldiers now lived in Judaea as compared to those present in Arabia at that time, some of whom were of Eastern extraction and were accustomed during their service to watch and take an active part in gladiatorial combats. While in the region or even after being discharged from the army and settling in one of the large cities of ancient Palestine, they maintained their behavioral patterns and cultural identity, including watching shows in the amphitheater. The existence of a Roman amphitheater in Caesarea, the seat of the Roman administration and government in the province, and in places with an increased Roman and military presence, such as Eleutheropolis, Legio, and later on perhaps also Neapolis, demonstrates this phenomenon (Figure 2.2).²⁴ With the annexation of the Nabataean kingdom and the establishment of Bostra as the capital of the province in 106 CE new elements were introduced into the city's population, including the influx of soldiers of the Roman legion—a change that ultimately spurred the construction of the amphitheater there.²⁵

The construction of amphitheaters for the Roman population in ancient Palestine does not necessarily indicate that the remaining segments of society, including the Jews (see Chap. 5), did not attend these performances. In fact, the sermons of several rabbis make many references to the amphitheater and its performances as compared to other institu-

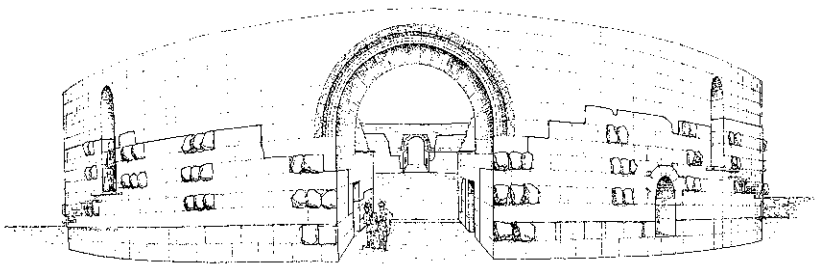


FIGURE 2.2 Eleutheropolis, reconstruction of the Roman amphitheater (courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority, following Amos Kloner and Alain Hübsch, “The Roman Amphitheater of Bet Guvrin: A Preliminary Report on the 1992, 1993, and 1994 Seasons,” *Atiqot* 30 [1996]: 89, fig. 8).

tions, and attest, even indirectly, to the Jewish community's exposure and attraction to the amphitheater specifically. However, from the outset, the need and initiative for constructing such buildings, and perhaps also for their funding, came from Roman sources—the provincial government, the army and military veterans—but the indigenous population of ancient Palestine also benefited from them as well, without fully assimilating this foreign culture into their way of life.²⁶

A similar phenomenon also prevailed in the Greek world, where only a few amphitheaters have been discovered to date.²⁷ Roman control over the cities of Greece, Crete, and Asia Minor, as well as Roman presence in these places and the establishment of the imperial cult there during Augustus's reign and the first centuries CE, had a significant impact on the urban culture of the Hellenic population.²⁸ Over time, there was a noticeable rise in the number of cities that held gladiatorial combats and animal baiting within their borders, just as the archaeological, epigraphical, and artistic evidence coming specifically from Asia Minor suggests. This change, which according to Katherine Welch began in Athens in the first century CE, was not followed by the massive construction of amphitheaters throughout the Greek world; rather, these performances were held in theaters that accommodated themselves to these activities.²⁹ The orchestra was expanded by removing the lower rows of seats in the *cavea*, and the size of the stage was reduced, while both of these elements were surrounded by a high podium that would make it possible for these performances to take place in the theater.³⁰ The architecture of the remodeled buildings in the Greek world differed from that of the oval amphitheaters in ancient Palestine; however, it seems that the cultural change in both regions—the establishment of arenas and the holding of amphitheatrical shows—stemmed from similar reasons, namely, a growing Roman presence that, over time, also influenced the behavioral patterns of the local population.

From the outset, the theatrical performances, chariot races, and athletic competitions that were the focus of Graeco-Roman culture were well accepted by the populations of ancient Palestine; for this reason they built theaters and hippodromes in various locales that would meet

their needs based on their economic means. In contrast, the violent nature of the gladiatorial combats and animal baiting was less acceptable to the populations of the East, and only after the burgeoning Romanization of the local culture do we find a rise, albeit negligible, in the number of amphitheaters. The number of theaters in Palestine was much greater than the number of hippodromes, not to speak of amphitheaters, which were very few.³¹ The fact that the amphitheaters were initially intended to answer the needs of the Roman population living in the administrative and governmental centers of ancient Palestine explains, on the one hand, the small number of buildings in the overall area. The relatively few hippodromes in the region, on the other, did not result from the negative attitude of the oriental population toward athletic competitions and chariot races, but rather, as mentioned earlier, from certain cities' lack of financial means to add another costly building to their realm.

Cultural Adaptation in Time and Space

The distribution of buildings for mass entertainment in the cities of ancient Palestine, the Decapolis, and Arabia, as enumerated earlier, reflects a cultural phenomenon at the height of its flourish; however, it is clear that these buildings were not constructed all at once or as a single royal, governmental, or civil initiative. Herod was the first to establish buildings for mass entertainment in ancient Palestine, and by this undertaking opened a new gateway through which the local populations could be exposed to a heretofore unknown foreign culture. Their initial contact with new cultural patterns—theatrical performances, chariot races, athletic competitions, and gladiatorial combats—was rife with obstacles, at least in Jewish society, but it seems that the population at large was supportive of these shows and enjoyed their existence. This positive attitude led to the subsequent establishment of many such edifices throughout the region.

The pace at which the various buildings were constructed is indicative of the indigenous populations' readiness to accept and internalize these Graeco-Roman patterns. Studies of the theaters of ancient Pales-

tine point to two main building stages stretching over a period of about three hundred years. The first relates to Herod's building projects and was followed by a hiatus of some one hundred years in the building of theaters in the region—barring the theater in Petra dating to the time of Aretas IV (9 BCE–40 CE). In the second stage, toward the end of the first century CE, theater construction was revived and thrived until the mid-third century CE. The pace of theater construction in the second stage was not uniform but occurred in several waves, or chronological subperiods. Fuks, for example, assigns two building stages to the region, dating the first to the end of the first century to mid-second century CE and the second to the Antonine and Severan eras.³² Segal, in contrast, divides the construction of the post-Herodian theaters into three stages: the earliest dates to the first to early second centuries CE, the middle stage to the Antonine period, and the final one to the Severan period.³³

The small number of hippodromes in the region does not allow us to establish a precise division, even though the data here indicate—as in the case of the theater—that there were two main building stages with a gap of one hundred or more years between them. The first stage dates to the Herodian period and the second to the second and third centuries CE. The picture regarding the amphitheater differs slightly from the aforementioned institutions. The oval Roman amphitheater was built no earlier than the second century CE, and since we know that amphitheatrical performances were held in Herod's day, it seems that the same chronological gap applied to the cultural ambience in this case as well. Amphitheatrical performances in the Herodian period were held in the hippo-stadium and, in the second century CE, also in the oval amphitheater, which existed in several cities of ancient Palestine.

Accordingly, Herod's building initiatives remain a unique phenomenon that, in the spirit of the times, was meant to serve his political agenda of incorporating his kingdom into the sociocultural realm. Only about one hundred years later was theater construction resumed and subsequently followed by the building of hippodromes and amphitheaters—although, as noted, the overall number of the latter is distinctly smaller

than the former. At first, these buildings were erected sporadically, but over time the number of theaters increased dramatically.³⁴

The reservations regarding the proposed chronology, the explanation given by scholars for the gaps in building activity, and the subsequent historical-cultural implications stem from several factors that have not always been taken into consideration. Besides the theaters in Gerasa, which are dated by inscriptions, a series of historical, archaeological, stratigraphic, architectural, and artistic factors served as the main basis for dating the other buildings in the region. The construction of the theater, hippodrome, or amphitheater, like other public buildings, was not an easy task, nor was it executed in one block of time. It is conceivable that building activity was repeatedly halted because of funding difficulties, as Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia-Pontus, describes in his letters to the emperor Trajan.³⁵ In such cases, a building may have been founded in one period while its construction was completed only a decade or more later and only became operational in the later period.

The collective data from all the buildings, presented below, point to a *longue durée* of construction with a short hiatus of only several decades in the first century CE. The building initiative up to the first half of the first century CE is attributed directly to kings, when known, or to the autonomous cities in the region. The earliest buildings—the theater, hippo-stadium, and stadium—were built by Herod in Caesarea, Jerusalem, Jericho, and Samaria;³⁶ the king even contributed to the construction of such buildings and their ongoing games in the neighboring cities of Damascus and Sidon.³⁷ Herod Antipas seems to have built the theater and stadium when he founded his new capital Tiberias in the Galilee,³⁸ Aretas IV built the theater in Petra in the first half of the first century CE,³⁹ and slightly later Agrippa I contributed to the construction of the theater and the “amphitheater” in Berytus.⁴⁰ The theater in Canatha, the southern theater in Scythopolis, and the northern theater in Gadara were founded in the first half of the first century CE,⁴¹ and it is probable that around this time there was a theater in Ascalon as well.⁴² The theater performances held in Caesarea in honor of the emperor during the reign of Agrippa I attest that such shows continued to take place within

the Herodian kingdom—barring Jerusalem, where it is doubtful whether all these buildings still stood after Herod's death and Archelaus's removal from the seat of government.⁴³

Most of the buildings in the region were constructed only in the latter half of the first century CE and the following centuries: at first only theaters were built, and later on, in the course of the second century CE, hippodromes and amphitheaters began to appear. The first evidence of theaters or *odea* comes from Hippos, Gerasa, Philadelphia, and Pella in the Decapolis in the latter half of the first century CE.⁴⁴ Around this time, the southern theater in Scythopolis was rebuilt and enlarged significantly, and Malalas notes that Vespasian built an *odeon* in Caesarea.⁴⁵ At the turn of the first century CE and in the early second, additional buildings were constructed in Sepphoris and Petra.⁴⁶ Like some of the other public buildings in Bostra, the theater was constructed after the city had become the provincial capital of Arabia in 106 CE, under Trajan.⁴⁷ The theater in Neapolis and the *odea* in Philadelphia and Scythopolis are dated to the first half of the second century CE, when, as attested in the *Chronikon Paschale*, Hadrian built the theater in Jerusalem.⁴⁸ The hippodrome in Neapolis and the amphitheater in Caesarea were also constructed at this juncture.⁴⁹ In the second half of the second century, theaters were built in Gerasa (north) and Caesarea,⁵⁰ as were the hippodromes in Scythopolis, Caesarea (east), and Gerasa, and the amphitheater in Eleutheropolis.⁵¹ Other buildings are generally dated to the second century CE—the theaters in Ḥammad Gader, Capitolias, Abila, and Dor, as well as the amphitheaters in Bostra and Legio.⁵²

The end of the second century CE and the first third of the third—the Severan era—are marked by a veritable flourish both in the construction of new buildings and the expansion and renovation of existing structures. The theaters in Gadara (west), Scythopolis (north), Samaria, Elusa, Shuni-Maiumas, Antipatris, and Birketein (north of Gerasa), as well as the hippodrome in Gadara, were constructed at this time,⁵³ whereas significant renovations were also conducted in the southern theater at Scythopolis, the northern theater in Gerasa, and Bostra.⁵⁴ The latest buildings to have been built in the region were erected in Arabia by

Philip the Arab (244–249 CE)—a theater in his hometown of Shahba-Philippopolis, and apparently a hippodrome in Bostra.⁵⁵ A later stage reflects the conversion of a theater and some hippodromes for amphitheatrical performances or for the exhibition of animals in the third and fourth centuries CE (see below, as well as Chap. 6, for discussions on the amphitheater).

After a short hiatus in the first century CE, the construction of buildings for mass entertainment that would host the various performances conducted in the cities of ancient Palestine, the Decapolis, and Arabia was characterized by an ongoing process that began in the latter half of the first century CE and ended sometime in the mid-third century CE. The continuation of this process is attested by a great concern with the state of the existing buildings, which was translated in some of them by expansion, remodeling, and structural changes. The early theaters in Scythopolis (south) and Caesarea, for example, were fully rebuilt at some point, while the theater in Canatha was enlarged and boasted a new stage; the northern theater in Gerasa added an upper *cavea*, the stage was enlarged, and the *scaena* was raised accordingly. In contrast, the construction of the hippodrome in Gadara was never completed.⁵⁶ At times renovations focused on only one part of a building, such as the *scaenae* in the southern theater in Gerasa and Bostra or the *cavea* and *parodoi* in the amphitheater in Eleutheropolis.⁵⁷

What, then, was the reason for the short break in construction in the first century CE? Should it be viewed as an expression of the local population's apprehension about adopting new cultural patterns, or perhaps it was the outcome of circumstances that were not necessarily connected to their acceptance of the performances and games in the region? Frézouls, followed by other scholars, claims that the lack of interest in the theater and its performances prevented its acceptance in the Roman East—Syria, ancient Palestine, and Arabia—maintaining that the population's exposure to Graeco-Roman culture, together with the economic prosperity in the cities toward the end of the first century CE, led to a renewal in the construction of theaters in the region.⁵⁸ The claim that the theater, hippodrome, and amphitheater performances were foreign to

the inhabitants of the East is correct, though perhaps only in the beginning of the period. It certainly applies to Jewish society, but there is no reason to assume that it was valid for the entire period or relevant to the larger non-Jewish population of ancient Palestine. Once exposed to the new cultural patterns, the indigenous population exhibited an affinity to them and to their local rulers—Herod, Aretas IV, and Agrippa I—who were well aware of the changes occurring within their kingdom and made great efforts to maintain the buildings and fund regular performances, competitions, and spectacles. The short hiatus in construction between the two periods, therefore, did not stem from the foreign character of the performances on the local cultural scene, but rather from the lack of a crucial component at this time, to be discussed in what follows.

After Herod's death his kingdom was divided among his three sons, and with the deposition of Archelaus in 6 CE his ethnarchy was annexed and became a procuratorial province.⁵⁹ Except for the brief reign of Agrippa I, Judaea retained this status until the Great Revolt against Rome. Following the revolt and throughout the second century CE, the cities of Palestine flourished and developed markedly. The city assembly (*demos*) and the city council (*boule*) assumed greater power in administering their cities and took pains to glorify and adorn them with various public buildings. The renewed founding of many cities in ancient Palestine, accompanied by their rise in status, the privilege of the autonomous minting of coins, large-scale construction, and the establishment of municipal and cultural institutions, are hallmarks of this same era. This process culminated in the second and early third centuries CE, at the height of the *pax Romana* throughout the entire Roman Empire.⁶⁰

A synthesis of the data points to a chronological connection between the existence of ruling bodies interested and involved in urban development and the building stages defined earlier. These ruling bodies—whether royal or municipal—had important roles in promoting monumental projects intended for the benefit of the general public in the Roman city. They initiated, funded, and supervised the establishment

of public buildings, including those for mass entertainment, and were even responsible for the ongoing organization and operation of performances. Thus, the hiatus in building construction between the two stages did not result from the nature of the building, the quality of the performances, or the cultural tastes of the local population, but was an outcome of the absence of financial support in the region during those years.

The impetus for holding theatrical performances, chariot races, athletic competitions, or amphitheatrical shows and for constructing certain buildings designated for these events differed from one period to the next. The establishment of the various institutions in the Herodian period was only one dimension of the king's building projects in ancient Palestine. Owing to his western proclivities, he wished to expose the local population to Graeco-Roman culture, although his intentions were not purely altruistic, as he had hoped, consequently, to aggrandize his name.

With the waning of the Herodian dynasty, the construction of buildings for mass entertainment with royal funds diminished dramatically, while the implementation of new initiatives in some locales immediately thereafter was very limited. The renewal of construction several decades later was no longer dependent on a specific person or restricted to one kingdom; it appears that many cities in ancient Palestine conducted games and to this end constructed several buildings in their realm. The rise in the city's power and status in the last quarter of the first century CE, the desire of the local population to embrace Graeco-Roman culture, and the local patriotism of its patrons are the main factors in the building renewal of this era.⁶¹

This change reveals yet another facet of the urban, economic, and cultural flourish in ancient Palestine after the Great Revolt against Rome, a process that gained momentum in the second century CE and reached its apogee in the first half of the third century CE.⁶² The urban populations were now privileged to acquire a measure of culture that differed from what they were accustomed to in the past, and by adopting the patterns of this new heritage were also able to express their loyalty and gratitude to Rome and its emperor in varying degrees.

A number of tannaitic sources attest for the first time, albeit indirectly, to the felt presence of the theater and hippodrome in the cities of Palestine in the first half of the second century CE. One tannaitic *mi-drash* interprets the verse “and you shall not follow their statutes” (Lev. 18:3) as follows: “You should not follow the ways of the nations in the matters of their laws, such as theaters, circuses, and stadiums.”⁶³ At the turn of the first and second centuries CE, Rabban Gamaliel commented on the nature of Rome’s authority: “In four ways the empire supports itself: tolls, baths, theaters, and crop-levies.”⁶⁴ R. Meir and other rabbis in the mid-second century discussed if and where it was permissible to attend theatrical performances.⁶⁵ These remarks and others made by some second-century rabbis indeed may allude to a change at this time that required an exchange of views and cautionary words (see Chap. 5).

The existence of a financing body as a prerequisite for building these structures is also evident in the political-urban reality of the neighboring Nabataean kingdom, where the royal initiative continued unabated throughout the first century CE.⁶⁶ A theater was built in Petra during the reign of Aretas IV and after it the theater in Sabra.⁶⁷ With the establishment of Provincia Arabia, the waning power of the Nabataean dynasty brought with it the termination of royal financing for construction, just as had occurred about one hundred years earlier in the nearby Herodian kingdom. From now on, the cities throughout the new province were responsible for constructing the buildings in their realm, and they functioned according to their financial capabilities and the degree of the inhabitants’ interest in the various performances.

The initiative for constructing the buildings for mass entertainment and holding a variety of performances in ancient Palestine was a result of the prevailing circumstances in each period. The pace of construction, the growing number of buildings, and the diversity of performances attest to the gradual nature of the process by which the urban populations of ancient Palestine in the first centuries CE became exposed to Graeco-Roman culture and expressed their willingness to assimilate it into their daily life. The process began in Herod’s time, became stronger in the second century, at a different pace from place to place, and reached its

peak with the construction of the last buildings in the region in the Severan era.

The Location of the Buildings within the Urban Infrastructure

A theater was erected in almost every city of ancient Palestine, the Decapolis, and Arabia, and some cities also boasted a hippodrome or amphitheater. The presence of all three institutions is known only in Caesarea and Bostra. In contrast, Scythopolis, Neapolis, Gadara, and Gerasa had only two—a theater and a hippodrome—of which the latter was later converted in some places into an amphitheater. Every city in which a hippodrome or an amphitheater has been discovered to date also had at least one theater, except for Eleutheropolis, where only an amphitheater was found. King Herod's political status and financial means allowed him to build a theater and hippo-stadium concurrently in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Jericho, and to hold performances, chariot races, athletic competitions, and gladiatorial combats in them simultaneously. The pace of construction in the other cities, however, was different: the theater was built first, and only several decades later the hippodrome or amphitheater was added. The southern theater in Scythopolis, for example, was built in the first half of the first century CE, and the hippodrome was added in the second century CE.

The location of these public buildings in ancient Palestine follows patterns familiar in other parts of the Roman world. While most theaters were incorporated into the urban infrastructure, the hippodromes or amphitheaters were located outside the city, along one of the main arteries leading to and from it. In contrast, the Herodian theater and hippo-stadium in Caesarea were in close proximity to each other on the southwestern fringes of the city, adjacent to the royal palace. Elsewhere, the various structures were situated outside the urban infrastructure. In Bostra, all three buildings were clustered together at the southern end of the city, whereas in Petra the two theaters were positioned along the road leading into the city.

The theater was usually located in the civic center beside other public buildings and close to one of the main thoroughfares—the *cardo*, *decum-*

anus, or some other important street, affording convenient access to the building by large crowds of people during the performances. The line of the *scaena* in Philippopolis and Gadara is parallel to and contiguous with the adjacent street; the theaters in Scythopolis and Gadara (north) deviate slightly from the nearby road; yet the northern theater in Gerasa was built on a natural slope at some distance from the *decumanus*, where a portico was added to bridge the space between the two to form one continuous unit (Figure 2.3).⁶⁸ In selecting the proper site for the theater in each locale, the architects followed Roman conventions by creating a connection between public structures and architectural continuity.⁶⁹

The location of the theater within the urban infrastructure was dictated by the existence of a natural slope within the city limits, upon which it and especially the lower *cavea* were constructed (see below). The desire to cut construction costs—both in building materials and by



FIGURE 2.3 Gerasa. The portico built adjacent to the *decumanus* bridges the gap between the city's main thoroughfare and northern theater (photo by Zeev Weiss).

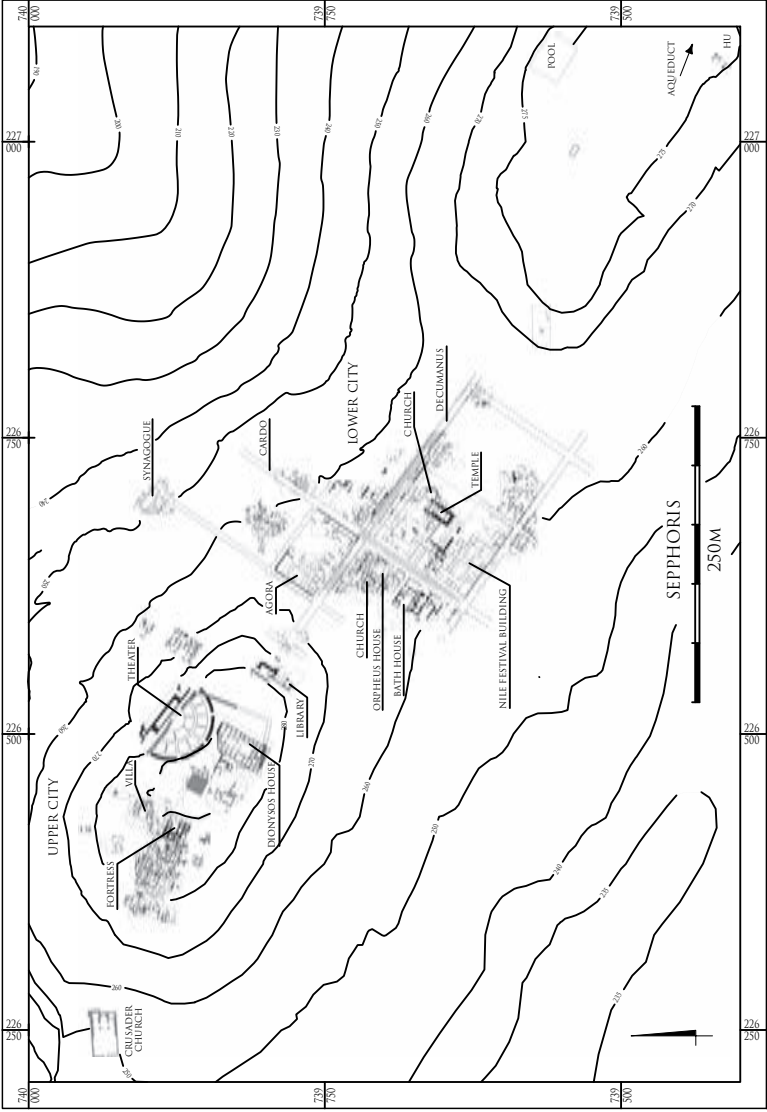


FIGURE 2.4 Sepphoris, city plan. The theater was constructed on the northern slope of the hill, outside the civic center to its east (drawings by Anna Iamim).

conforming to the natural topography of the city—led to the erection of the theater on the slope even though it lay on the perimeter of the city (Neapolis), outside the limits of the civic center (Sepphoris), or facing in a different direction from the rest of the buildings in the city (Scythopolis) (Figure 2.4).⁷⁰ Nevertheless, main thoroughfares led to the theater even if it was located on the city's periphery, thereby ultimately connecting it with the rest of the public buildings in the Roman city.

Some cities boasted two theaters—one large and one small. In Philadelphia these buildings were constructed on either side of the forum, with their façades facing it; in Petra they were found alongside the road leading into the city; and in Scythopolis the buildings were located in conjunction with the main thoroughfare—Palladius Street—running through the civic center.⁷¹ In Caesarea, Gerasa, and Gadara, however, these buildings were built in different parts of the city.

Theaters were also built in several suburbs or cultic compounds that lay beyond the urban centers of the large cities. The thermal baths in Hammat Gader, a suburb of Gadara, had a theater that was used by those frequenting the baths, and similar buildings existed in Shuni-Maiumas north of Caesarea, at Birketein north of Gerasa, as well as at Canatha, Sahr, and Sabra.⁷²

Outside of the populated area, but still within the city limits, was a hippodrome or amphitheater that was usually built alongside a road leading into and out of the city. The exact location of these structures on the city's periphery differed from place to place. The hippo-stadium in Caesarea was situated on the seacoast, between the port and the theater, while the hippodrome added later on was located to the east (Figure 2.5). The hippodrome in Neapolis was located north of the city, in Gadara to the west, and in Bostra to the south. The Roman amphitheater in Caesarea was built northeast of the city, in Bostra in the south, and in Eleutheropoli in the north. Building the hippodrome or amphitheater along main thoroughfares provided easy access both for the city's inhabitants and those from nearby settlements who came to see the races and competitions held there. The hippodrome in Scythopolis, which later was converted into an amphitheater, was built near the road leading out of the

city southward, toward “the Gate of Campon until Ḥaqla Ḥivrata,” and from there to Jericho, with one branch of the road running toward Neapolis.⁷³ In Gerasa it was located on the side of the road running from Philadelphia into the city from the south, whereas in Tiberias the stadium was built on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, next to the road running toward Bet Ma’on.⁷⁴ It is interesting to note that the Roman hippodromes in Caesarea (east) and Neapolis, and probably also the stadium in Tiberias, were built next to those cities’ cemeteries. This fact should not be surprising, as building such a large structure would require an expansive area that could be found only outside a city’s settled area, in a place where stone quarries, agricultural installations, and burial caves were also found hewn alongside the main roads leading to and from the cities.

The sources at our disposal also describe a similar reality wherein the theater, unlike the hippodrome and amphitheater, was perceived by the rabbis as one of the most important institutions alongside other public buildings in the urban matrix. R. Meir, wishing to describe the empire’s loss of power, said: “It may be said one day that here [was] its palace, here [was] its theater, here was its *bima* (stage), and you looked at the spot and it was gone.”⁷⁷⁵ A more detailed description of the civic buildings within the urban context that aims to explain a verse in Psalm 104:8 appears in the slave parable: “to whom his master said: Wait for me in the marketplace without specifying the spot.” The slave, who did not understand his master’s request to wait in the marketplace, presumably on the main colonnaded street,⁷⁶ deliberated with himself and said: “Perhaps he wanted me to wait for him near the basilica or near the bathhouse or near the theater.” His master, upon finding him, slapped his face, saying: “I sent you to the entrance of the governor’s residence.”⁷⁷⁷ The parable indicates that not only a theater existed in the city near other public buildings, but also that the townspeople used it as a landmark or meeting place in their daily lives.⁷⁸ In contrast, the stadium and *campon* (that is, the hippodrome, at least in rabbinic parlance) were located outside the city limits.⁷⁹

The architectural urban landscape in ancient Palestine, resembling other city plans in the Roman world, was influenced by a number



FIGURE 2.5 Caesarea, city plan. The theater and the western hippo-stadium are located inside the city, whereas the *odeon*, eastern hippodrome, and amphitheater lie on its outskirts (courtesy of Kenneth G. Holum; drawings by Anna Iamim).

of factors.⁸⁰ The large number of theaters in the region bears silent testimony to the fact that, culturally speaking, theater performances, in comparison to other events, were more popular among the local population and therefore were the first buildings for mass entertainment to be built in a city. Theaters did not require a very large public space and were usually built with the founding or refounding of a city, when other public buildings were also being erected in its center. The decision to establish the theater first—either because theatrical performances were popular or because the construction of other buildings incurred greater expenses—is not the only factor responsible for the location of the theater within the city and other buildings outside it.

The hippodrome and the amphitheater are large structures whose construction required procuring a very large tract of land that may have been earmarked for other public buildings. As we have seen earlier, both were added to the city only at a later stage, and their incorporation into the existing urban plan, especially in the civic center, would have required destroying other buildings in the area. The allocation of a large plot of land in the heart of the city for structures whose use was rather infrequent would come at the expense of other, more essential, buildings in the lives of the citizens and would also disrupt the daily life and order of the city. The performances in the hippodrome and amphitheater attracted large crowds, at times double or more the number of theatergoers; the convergence of large crowds of spectators in one of the two buildings and their exit all at once onto the nearby streets could have caused a great tumult and congestion in the civic center, where other activities were being routinely conducted.⁸¹

The location of both these institutions outside the city would have been ideal for many reasons, including easy access to them, freeing up the space around them, and controlling the crowds attending the competitions and spectacles. The space around these buildings was where people gathered before entering, and it is from there that the crowds dispersed at the end of a performance. The topography, a convenient access road into the city from the urban periphery, and the availability of

space ultimately determined the location of the hippodrome or amphitheater in each locale.

Monuments for Public Entertainment: Structure and Architecture

The cities of ancient Palestine boasting monumental public buildings show clear signs of the proliferation of Graeco-Roman culture in the region. The beauty, splendor, and magnitude of the theaters, hippodromes, and amphitheaters would be evident to anyone walking today through the major cities of ancient Palestine. The massive presence of the buildings that stood in all their glory in antiquity was most probably awe-inspiring and undoubtedly served as a source of pride and patriotism for the local inhabitants. An analysis of the architecture of the buildings for public entertainment in ancient Palestine ought to include—for the sake of comparison, completion of the data, or reconstruction of some missing elements—the plethora of finds uncovered to date in the cities of the Decapolis and Arabia. To this end, the discussion below will present the important archaeological remains that form the foundation upon which the leisure cultural patterns in the region have been assessed. It will examine the nature of each building and will also allow us to draw conclusions about the cultural preferences of the region's inhabitants.

A. The Theater

The theater was the most common public building for mass entertainment in the region. Some cities had even two or three theaters—one of which was sometimes located in the suburbs. A second or third such building that was added in a city already boasting a large- or medium-size theater was usually medium size or of small dimensions. Architecturally speaking, the plan of the large theater, including its various components and features, is strikingly similar to that of the small theater, which was sometimes called an *odeon*.⁸²

The epigraphical and papyrological finds in the region are inconsistent in their use of the terms “theater” and “*odeon*” when referring to the small building. The southern theater, the largest of all the structures that stood in Gerasa, is called a theater, while the northern building in this city, much smaller than its southern counterpart, is called an *odeon* (Figure 2.6).⁸³ Theophanes, in the early fourth century CE, observed that Ascalon had a theater and an *odeon*—however, only the latter has been partially excavated in recent years.⁸⁴ Another inscription, incised on the podium delimiting the orchestra in the small theater at Canatha, refers to the construction of an *odeon* that resembled a theater.⁸⁵ In contrast to these inscriptions, from which it seemingly emerges that there is some sort of correspondence between the name of the building and its size, an inscription from Elusa mentions the renovation of a pavement in the old theater.⁸⁶ The plan of the building at Elusa is similar to those at Canatha and Gerasa, and even though its dimensions are smaller than the buildings at the latter sites, it is called a theater and not an *odeon*. It should thus be concluded that the small buildings in ancient Palestine, the Decapolis, and Arabia were sometimes called theaters and at other times *odea*. Their nomenclature did not always derive from the small size of the building but possibly from the function it served.

Several parameters were defined for determining the purpose of the *odeon* or *bouleuterion* (council house)—whether by its size, location in the urban plan, proximity to other public buildings in the city, capacity, or design of its architectural components such as the *tribunal*, altar, stage, entrances, and *scaenae frons*⁸⁷ (although they are not necessarily applicable for distinguishing it from the theater). The various building requirements for theatrical and musical performances—the raised stage on which the performances were held, the semicircular *cavea* in which the audience sat, and the orchestra in between—were quite similar, and thus it is doubtful whether one could suggest clear parameters other than the dimensions and proportions in order to determine what building was designated for which type of performances.

Looking at the broader context, it is suggested that the big cities of ancient Palestine had two theaters, one large and the other small, in or-



FIGURE 2.6 Gerasa, general view of the southern theater (photo by Zeev Weiss).

der to meet the growing cultural needs of their local populations. Accordingly, the larger building—the theater—was used for theatrical performances, while the smaller structure—the *odeon*—was designated for concerts, recitals, and choral performances. The distinction between the two types of buildings is clearer in large urban contexts, but in the peripheral cities and suburbs the only theater, either medium or small in size, was actually a multipurpose building for various types of performances and events (Figure 2.7). There were cities that sometimes held theatrical performances in the *odeon* as well and were intended for a limited audience; performances of an “odeonic” nature also could have been held in the municipal theater. Evidence of the multipurpose nature of these buildings was also found in inscriptions referring to the “civic tribes,” which were incised on the bottom row of seats in the first *cavea* of the northern theater in Gerasa and Neapolis. These inscriptions inform us that municipal conventions, and perhaps also meetings of the local *boule*, were held in the *odeon*, similar to the large halls of today.⁸⁸ The distribution of

seats was in all probability determined by the political activity that the city's inhabitants sometimes conducted within the building, similar to this age-old tradition in the Greek world.

The Cavea. In the search for a suitable site to build a theater, Vitruvius noted that one must choose an appropriate site not open to the strong winds and where the sun does not beat down on the heads of the spectators, adding the precaution that it should not be exposed to the south.⁸⁹ Most *caveae* indeed face north, and the existence of a natural slope within the city—an essential component for the construction of theaters in ancient Palestine—dictated the location and orientation of the buildings, which were at times diverted slightly to the east or west.

The Roman building materials and techniques enabled the construction of theaters everywhere, whether on the plain or on difficult terrain, unlike the Greek and Hellenistic theater, in which the *cavea* was built on a natural slope. The Romans, skilled in construction, built their theaters in any configuration—including on the vaulted substructures that often



FIGURE 2.7 Hippos, aerial view of the small theater (courtesy of Michael Eisenberg).

rose to a height of several stories. This was intended primarily to support the blocks of seats but was also actually used for entering and exiting the building, for regulating traffic inside, and for allowing easy passage between the various sections of the *cavea*.

The theater in Bostra, built on a plain, is the only one in ancient Palestine and Arabia in which the *cavea* was built in its entirety on a network of vaulted substructures. In contrast, the theater in Petra was cut into the rock, while in Samaria, Hammat Gader, and Birketein they were built on the natural slope. However, most of the theaters in our region lie between these extremes, implementing both methods when constructing the desirable incline for the *cavea*. In Sepphoris, Pella, and Philipopolis, for example, the *ima* (lower) *cavea* was built on a natural slope, and in Caesarea, Scythopolis, and Gerasa it was dug into the ground while the *media* or *summa cavea* was built on top of a number of vaults located on one level (Figure 2.8).⁹⁰ An annular vaulted corridor was usually found there, and perpendicular to it stood a varying number of radial vaulted passageways—*vomitoria*—emerging from the middle of the block of seats and used for entering and exiting the building. The two lateral vaulted entrances, the *aditus maximi*, were located on either side of the building, between the *cavea* and *scaena*, giving direct access into the orchestra. Several theaters had additional entrances built on either side of the *scaena*, usually in places having only a few *vomitoria*, either because the path of the corridor or access to them was difficult, or, alternatively, because the back wall of the *scaena* was close to the city's main traffic artery and gave direct access into the building.

The *cavea* in the theaters of ancient Palestine was arranged in a semi-circle opposite the stage. It was usually divided into two or three horizontal blocks (*maeniana*) separated by passageways (*praecinctiones*)—the lower gallery (*ima cavea*), middle gallery (*media cavea*), and upper gallery (*summa cavea*). The number of rows in each section differed from site to site. Rows of steps (*scalaria*) covering the entire *cavea* divided it into an irregular number of vertical, wedge-shaped blocks (*cunei*). The vertical division of the *cavea* into *cunei* was implemented in every theater, although the number of *cunei* and the distribution of the staircases over



FIGURE 2.8 The Roman theater in Caesarea. The lower *cavea* is built on the natural slope, whereas the upper *cavea* rests on vaults (photo by Zeev Weiss).

the *cavea* in ancient Palestinian theaters varied from place to place, and even within the same building. In some theaters, small shrines were located on the building's axis at the top of the *cavea*; however, evidence for such temples in the region is known only in the large theater in Philadelphia.⁹¹

The Roman theater had a colonnade running across the top of the *cavea*, what Vitruvius called a *porticus*; this is where theatergoers would rest or take shelter between performances on hot or rainy days. In Bostra, the well-preserved *porticus* conformed to the Vitruvian model, in which its roof was built at the same height as the *scaena* (Figure 2.9).⁹² Elsewhere, a semicircular or square plaza surrounded by porticoes located behind the *scaena* (*porticus post scaenum*) was used for the same purpose.⁹³

The *cavea* in these theaters is not uniform, except where it touches the orchestra and for which two steadfast solutions were implemented. The podium wall running around the perimeter of the orchestra in the

theaters of western Palestine is relatively low, about 1 meter (Figure 2.10).⁹⁴ All the *scalaria* in these theaters cut through this wall and gave direct access to the orchestra. In the theaters of Transjordan, the same podium was relatively higher, about 1.2–1.5 meters,⁹⁵ and, contrary to the former, all the *scalaria* reached the walkway that ran at the top of the podium wall surrounding the orchestra (Figure 2.11). A single entrance stood in the center of the podium wall in most of these theaters, and through it there was limited passage from the *cavea* to the orchestra. Additional steps going up to the *cavea* were located on either side of the podium, next to the *aditus maximi*, thereby rendering passage between the *cavea* and the orchestra difficult. Despite the architectural differences between ancient Palestine and Transjordan, it seems that suitable arrangements were made in both to separate those sitting in the *cavea* from the distinguished guests in the orchestra, as will be demonstrated below.

The *tribunalia*, the boxes reserved for the *praetores*, the highest-ranking officials in the city, who also contributed funds to the performances, were



FIGURE 2.9 Bostra. View of the theater, with the *porticus* running across the top of the *cavea* (courtesy of Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem).



Figure 2.10 Scythopolis, the theater. Note the *scalaria* that cut through the podium, giving direct access to the orchestra (courtesy of Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem).

located above the *aditus maximi* to the sides of the stage (Figure 2.9). These were spacious boxes equipped with stone or wooden seats for the dignitaries watching the shows onstage from up close. From this angle, they were able to get a good view of the masses crowding into the theater, while at the same time the masses were able to view the authoritative presence of the dignitaries sitting in the *tribunalia*, at some distance from the crowds. The *tribunalia*, whether large or small, were one of the distinctive marks of the imperial theater, built in the same place in the various buildings. However, they were not found at every site; in some theaters (Caesarea, Philadelphia, or Shuni-Maiumas, for example), additional seats of honor were set apart in the center of the *cavea*, opposite the stage, on the central axis of the building. Frank Sear maintains that these boxes, which are especially characteristic of the theaters in the eastern provinces, are reminiscent of the Hellenistic tradition and the ruler cult.⁹⁶ The location of the boxes in the *ima cavea*, in whatever theater they were found, was well emphasized architecturally, while the special

staircase leading directly into the boxes from the orchestra further emphasized their importance.

The theaters in ancient Palestine, the Decapolis, and Arabia, both large and small, were for the most part open-air spaces where the spectators sat under the sky. On special occasions, or on hot days, an awning (*velum*) was stretched above the heads of the spectators in the auditorium to provide shade. The *velum*, of course, was not preserved at any site, but the exterior walls of several Roman theaters bore rows of stone corbels with holes that held masts and staves from which cloth curtains were hung with ropes around the *cavea*.⁹⁷ Additional ropes tied to the ends of the cloth curtains raised and lowered the *velum*. A number of similar stone corbels were found still affixed outside the *cavea* wall in the theater in Bostra and attest to the use of a *velum* there. An inscription on one corbel mentions a group of soldiers (“*centuria* of Antonius L . . .”) who, it seems, were responsible for guarding and maneuvering the



FIGURE 2.11 Gadara, the western theater. The *scalaria* reach the walkway running across the top of the podium wall that surrounds the orchestra (photo by Zeev Weiss).

velum in the theater.⁹⁸ A slightly different *velum* was used in the northern theater in Gerasa. Six pairs of stone assemblies, each with an identical arrangement of mortises, were positioned at the top of the *cavea*. The holes probably stabilized the masts or were used to secure winch devices that would hold down the *velum*, whereas several shallow post holes carved in no special order into the *cavea*'s benches were used to support it.⁹⁹

The use of the *velum* in the region is further evinced by an Aramaic *targum* to Ezekiel 27:6 from ancient Palestine: “*bet ḥof’ah l’atitron* from Apulia.”¹⁰⁰ According to the *targum*, “*bet ḥof’ah*” (the canopy) in the theater (like the *velum*), made of cloth, came from Apulia in southern Italy. This verse and its translation are part of Ezekiel’s prophecy for Tyre, a naval power in the region, and for its magnificent fleet of ships. Those that shone with their beauty were built from various types of wood and set sail on the open sea, their taut sails allegorizing their power. The translation is based on an associative connection between the ships’ sails and the *velum* in the theater, for otherwise it would not be clear why this detail would be mentioned here. This association is founded on an assumption similar to that proposed by Rainer Graefe, whereby the known technology of ship sails served as a source of inspiration for the planning of the *velum* in the Roman theater.¹⁰¹ The *velum*—according to the translation—was not just a cloth covering stretched over the building, but rather one that could be opened and closed, similar to a sail that is raised and lowered when sailing on the open sea, the former having a horizontal movement and the latter vertical. It seems that the *velum* was more common in the theaters of ancient Palestine, and the translator—like his target audience—was familiar with this item and even aware of its mode of operation; otherwise, the idea expressed in the above *targum* would be insignificant to those who heard it.

The Orchestra. In the theaters of ancient Palestine, the Decapolis, and Arabia, dignitaries sat in the orchestra, which, conforming to the Roman model, was arranged in a semicircle.¹⁰² The orchestra in the Herodian theater in Caesarea was decorated with colored plaster, but in most places it was paved with stone slabs or colored marble.¹⁰³ Two or three

flat and wide well-preserved steps in Neapolis, Gerasa, and Philadelphia, for example, were built on the perimeter of the orchestra. Wooden or stone thrones (*bisellia*), measuring twice the width of a regular theater seat, stood on the steps for dignitaries (*prohedria*).

Channels and rain gutters that removed water from inside the building were found in the area of the theater, primarily beneath the floor of the orchestra.¹⁰⁴ It is assumed that water was used to flush the filth that accumulated in the theater during performances and was conveyed outside the building via these channels.

One or more altars usually stood in the area of the orchestra; a shallow depression in the middle of the orchestra itself marked the location of one of these altars.¹⁰⁵ Square, polygonal, or round in shape, it sometimes bore dedicatory inscriptions or was decorated with cultic images in low relief.¹⁰⁶ The existence of an altar in the theater or the conducting of cultic activity in the building prior to the performances moved the rabbis to forbid their communities to attend the theaters: "He who goes into the theaters of non-Jews is prohibited because of idolatry, says R. Meir. And the sages say: [If one goes into the theater] when they offer sacrifices, it is forbidden because of idolatry. But if not, it is forbidden merely because one would sit in the seat of scoffers."¹⁰⁷

The architectural expression for segregating dignitaries in the orchestra from the rest of the spectators in the *cavea* also differed from one region to the next. The far side of the narrow passageway (*balteus*) that ran along the perimeter of the orchestra at the foot of the lower *cavea* in theaters of western Palestine, such as Shuni-Maiumas, Samaria, and Neapolis, was revetted with a thin stone or marble barrier measuring about 0.9–1 meter high to define the area designated for dignitaries. It was built on the topmost of the three shallow steps encompassing the orchestra and at times even had corresponding entrances opposite the *scalaria* in the *cavea*.

No partitions were found in the theaters of Transjordan. This function was fulfilled by the high podium mentioned earlier, located at the bottom of the *cavea*. The *scalaria* in the *cavea* of the theaters in Gerasa, Philadelphia, and Bostra, for example, reached the top of the podium,

thereby preventing passage from it to the orchestra and achieving the desired segregation of dignitaries from the rest of the theatergoers. The *podia* in the theaters of Transjordan, which are generally similar to those in Asia Minor, do not attest at all to the existence of amphitheatrical performances in the building. Compared to the *podia* in the latter, those in Transjordan do not encompass the orchestra in its entirety and are not as high. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the *aditus maximi*, the entrance in the center of the podium, or the steps to its sides were blocked as they would be when life-threatening shows were held.¹⁰⁸

The Stage and Scaena. Performances in the theaters here, as elsewhere in the Roman world, were held on the stage (*pulpitum*), which usually had a wider diameter than the orchestra and was lavishly decorated. It was not especially high (ca. 1.3–1.5 m above the orchestra) and thereby facilitated a view of the stage from the low places, especially where the dignitaries sat. The floor of the stage was made of wood and usually supported by columns or vaults located beneath the stage, whose space (*hyposcaenium*) was at times divided into small chambers designated for various purposes.

The front of the stage (*proscenium*) was adorned with a variable number of alternating curved and rectangular niches as well as steps on its sides, near the *aditus maximi*, for going onto and leaving the stage (Figure 2.12). In small theaters, the *proscenium* was composed of only a few niches placed at fixed intervals, some of which were left completely undecorated. The *proscenium* and the niches were made of local stone, sometimes revetted with colored marble but mostly left plain, without any special decoration. In the Herodian theater of Caesarea, it was decorated in both early phases with wall paintings that continued the design on the orchestra floor; in Sepphoris, shallow pilasters were added between and inside the niches.¹⁰⁹ Small statues and, alternatively, stone reliefs with depictions relating to theater, cult, and mythology were placed inside the niches (Figure 2.13).¹¹⁰



FIGURE 2.12 Gerasa, frontal view of the stage in the southern theater (photo by Zeev Weiss).

The building behind the stage—the *scaena*—was several stories high, reaching the same height as the *cavea*, and its space (the *postscaenium*), usually one elongated area divided into several chambers, is where the actors would organize themselves and where theater equipment, costumes, and perhaps also stage props were probably kept. Both sides of the stage had wings (*versurae*) that linked the *scaena* to the *cavea*. The stage itself had five entrances: three in the wall of the *scaena*—one larger and wider opening with double leaves of doors (*valvae regiae*) in the center, and two smaller ones on either side (*hospitalia*)—and two additional entrances in the *versurae* that gave access from the lateral rooms and basilicas.¹¹¹ The *valvae regiae* in most theaters was set inside a semi-circular niche, and flanking the entrance on both sides were two or four monumental columns crowned by a gable to emphasize its importance. The *hospitalia*, in contrast, were set inside a rectangular or less elaborate



FIGURE 2.13 Caesarea, marble relief portraying a sacrifice by two male figures with an altar between them. It once decorated the *proscenium* of the Roman theater (courtesy of Rivka Gersht).

semicircular niche. The three stage entrances in the theater of Bostra, in contrast, were set within curved niches; this is the only example in the region of a *scaenae frons* designed in a manner more commonly found in the Western empire (Figure 2.9).¹¹² The rectilinear *scaenae frons* in the southern theater of Gerasa had a slightly different plan; its use of varied architectural elements afforded it an especially rich appearance (Figure 2.12).¹¹³

The wall of the *scaena* (*scaenae frons*), the richest component in the Roman theater that faced the audience, was splendidly decorated with a screen of columns (*columnatio*) supporting capitals and an entablature with niches in between for sculptures.¹¹⁴ The opulence of this feature in the theaters of ancient Palestine, the Decapolis, and Arabia was achieved by both the diverse architectural ornaments and the different types of

marble that were imported from afar and incorporated in the building.¹¹⁵ The diverse types of marble and other stone from which the columns were made, the entablature, and the statues, as well as the play of light and shadow resulting from a break in the contour of the *scaenae frons*, afforded it an especially sumptuous appearance.

Quite a few stone statues paying tribute to gods, emperors, athletes, or citizens¹¹⁶ decorated the local theaters, both large and small.¹¹⁷ The statues found in the debris covering the theaters stood in the niches in the *scaenae frons*, in the *proscenium*, to the sides of the stage, and even in the orchestra. The existence of statues in the theaters of ancient Palestine is also reflected in a parable attributed to Hillel the Elder, who explains to his students why he is punctilious about going to the bathhouse: "If the statues of kings, which are erected in theaters and circuses, are scoured and washed by the man who is appointed to look after them and who thereby obtains his livelihood through them, he is exalted in the company of the great kingdom—how much more, then, am I, who have been created in the image and likeness [of God], obligated to wash my own body and therefore must go to the bath."¹¹⁸ It is difficult to determine just how much Hillel, a Babylonian in origin who flourished in Herod's day, was familiar with the theater, which was a new institution in his time; although the historicity of Hillel's practice and of the account itself remains obscure, it seems that some unknown later homilist based the parable on a reality with which he and his contemporary target audience were familiar. Although no other source implies the existence of a particular person charged with cleaning the statues in the theaters of ancient Palestine, the description corroborates the archaeological remains of buildings decorated with statues, including those of emperors.

Segregation of the Ordines. The seating in Roman theaters was arranged according to rank.¹¹⁹ Dignitaries (senators and their families, knights, chief magistrates, priests, and benefactors) sat in the orchestra and the *ima cavea*, while others were seated by rank in the remaining *caveae*. In addition, certain places in the *cavea* were reserved for members of particular groups who would regularly sit together in the theater. Seating

arrangements also served to structure the movement, behavior, and semblance of people when entering the building and during the performances. Referring to the Augustan era, Paul Zanker states: “Even the architecture of the theater helped to inculcate and make visible the principles of social stratification. The networks of arched passageways and staircases served not only to insure an easy flow of traffic in and out of the theater, but to separate the audience according to rank.”¹²⁰

This may also be applied to the theaters of ancient Palestine, the Decapolis, and Arabia. While the masses gained access to the *cavea* through the various *vomitoria*, the *aditus maximi* on the sides of the building led distinguished guests directly to their seats in the orchestra. To maintain this division, the stone barrier in the theaters of western Palestine was built between the orchestra and the *cavea* (Figure 2.10), and the high podium at the bottom of the *cavea* served the same purpose in the theaters of Transjordan (Figure 2.11). The segregation of *ordines* in the theater was probably noted by Resh Laqish, a third-century rabbi who used it to explain Ecclesiastes 12:5: “It may be likened to a king who entered a province accompanied by his *duces*, *hipparchoi*, and *strategoï*. Although they all entered through the same gate of the *agon*, each went to the row corresponding to his rank.”¹²¹ The term *agon* in talmudic literature was suitable for all contests and games, but Resh Laqish was referring mainly to the theater, the dominant institution in the region, where seating in particular was strictly assigned by rank. The Roman officials in the provinces who attended the contests, together with the local elite, all entered the building through the same gate, but thereafter each was seated in a row designating the people in his rank.

Here, as elsewhere, the dignitaries sat in the orchestra and front rows (*prohedria*) in the local theaters. As noted, special thrones—*bisellia*, which were twice the width of a normal theater seat—were placed on the broad and shallow steps along the perimeter of the orchestra expressly for these people. The most important guests in the theater were seated in the *tribunalia*, located above the *aditus maximi* in some theaters and in special boxes in the *cavea* in others. In addition, adjacent thrones with running backs were sometimes located at the top of the *ima cavea* for

other dignitaries, probably less notable members of the local elite. According to the *lex Julia theatralis*, the first fourteen rows in the Roman theater were reserved for dignitaries; this directive, reinforced in the time of Augustus, was to be implemented in every building and at each event.¹²² It appears that this law was not fully enforced in the theaters of ancient Palestine, since the number of rows in the *ima cavea* was, in most cases, less than what was needed. Nevertheless, the lower rows of the *ima cavea* were meant for dignitaries, even though the number of rows differed from place to place based on the size of the local population, the status of the city, and the honor accorded its important inhabitants.

Further evidence for the allocation of seats in the theater, whether for individuals or defined groups, may be found in the few Greek inscriptions that have been preserved at several sites. The names of eleven tribes were incised on the first row of seats in the theater in Neapolis;¹²³ eight tribes were named after gods, and the remaining three after historical figures. The members of the largest tribe, Herakles, were allotted twenty-one seats in the theater in Neapolis, which were labeled with letters; the others were designated a smaller number of seats, varying from tribe to tribe—a total of 121 places for everyone. In the northern theater in Gerasa, where the picture is a bit more complicated, many inscriptions were carved on the seats in the *ima cavea*. The three western *cunei* were divided into twelve numbered sections, each designated by a Greek letter. Each such section was associated with a civic tribe; eleven are named after gods and the twelfth after the emperor Hadrian. At the bottom of the eastern *cuneus* was an inscription noting that the seats belonged to the city council. Later on, apparently in the third century CE, a newly carved inscription replacing one that was erased designated the lower rows of seats in the western *cunei* to the linen workers.¹²⁴ A calculation of the seats in the *ima cavea* indicates that the members of the *boule* were allotted about 275 seats, while each tribe was assigned 65–70 seats. In Pella, a Greek inscription incised on a column fragment discovered near the *odeon* reads: “Reserved for the elders of Zeus-Ares.”¹²⁵ This column probably stood beside several rows of seats in the *odeon* and, as

in Neapolis and Gerasa, marked their allocation to the (tribe of) elders of Zeus-Ares. Two inscriptions from theater seats found in Jerusalem refer to Dionysios and may suggest that a certain section within the building was reserved for inhabitants of the quarter named after its amphodarch, Dionysios.¹²⁶

In the theater in Bostra, Greek inscriptions were carved by an unskilled hand on a number of thrones next to the second *praecinctio* as well as on several seats in the *media cavea*. These inscriptions indicate that the seats were reserved for the bronze smiths, wineskin makers, and goldsmiths in the city, some of whom sat in the *cavea* and others on thrones.¹²⁷ The seats marked in the *cavea* were most probably assigned to members of the professional associations, and the few seats in the row of dignitaries were designated for those who stood at the head of the *collegium*.¹²⁸ In Caesarea, too, a block of seats in the local theater was reserved for the city's association of porters.¹²⁹

As elsewhere in the empire, the seating arrangements largely reflected a city's social stratification. The urban aristocracy merited special and honored places, as did the heads of the tribes and *collegia* who functioned in the city. The inscriptions, even if few in number and of poor quality, largely confirm this conclusion. They mention, for the most part, the names of the tribes or professions of those people for whom places were reserved in the *cavea* without mentioning their private names. The privilege of sitting in the reserved seats derived from their positions as holders of offices and not from an individual's social status or familial affiliation. The distribution of the inscriptions in the theater in Bostra demonstrates that the places reserved for officeholders were not confined only to the *ima cavea* and orchestra, but were found throughout the entire *cavea*.¹³⁰

Theaters and the Vitruvian Model. The theaters in our region were built according to the Roman model known throughout the empire. Although they are usually faithful to the original, they also bear several local characteristics.¹³¹ A comparison of the buildings' plans, components, and architectural details demonstrates, on the one hand, that no one theater

was identical to the next. On the other hand, several theaters built in one city or one specific region bear similar elements, alluding, perhaps, to a regional tradition that may have developed in those places.

The architectural resemblance between the theaters of ancient Palestine and such buildings elsewhere in the Mediterranean raises the question whether their plan was influenced—and, if so, how—by the model sketched by Vitruvius, a Roman architect and contemporary of Augustus, in his work *De Architectura*.¹³² A number of details in the theaters of ancient Palestine and Arabia indeed correspond to Vitruvius's model; however, a more comprehensive comparison of the archaeological remains with the architect's suggestions points to a lack of conformity between the two, here and in other theaters throughout the empire.¹³³ The discovery of several pieces of information in these theaters that correspond, coincidentally, to Vitruvius's writings does not prove conclusively that the architect was the source of these architectural features; rather, it reflects a knowledge of the prevailing architecture in the empire to which Vitruvius gave expression.

Rejection of the Vitruvian theory led to a search for some sort of model that might have served as the basis for planning the Roman theater in the imperial era; apparently no such model met the criteria of most of the buildings in ancient Palestine.¹³⁴ The Roman theater served as a source of inspiration for the planning, construction, and design of the buildings in ancient Palestine; moreover, besides architectural regionalism regarding a few details, a certain degree of freedom was evident in the design of various parts of the building. The architect at every site was aided by the Roman model and incorporated into it local solutions, some of which were the result of personal trials and others that were copied from a similar building in a nearby city. He used the knowledge he had accrued and, with his common sense, put together a plan that corresponded to the patron's request yet remained within the city's financial means. It was proportional, symmetrical, and contemporaneous, devoid of detailed plans founded on complex mathematical relationships between the various parts of the building. The architect's approach of integrating Roman tradition and personal initiative explains

the architectural and decorative diversity of the theaters in ancient Palestine.

B. The Hippodrome

Athletic competitions and chariot races were held in several cities of ancient Palestine in Herod's day, but were more evident in the second and third centuries CE. Although these events drew large crowds, it should not be assumed that every city designated one building for each type of performance—that is, a stadium for athletic competitions and a hippodrome for chariot races. Both structures were found within the bounds of only a few cities throughout the empire—from Rome in the West to Antioch in the East. In reality, only one building was usually erected, either a hippodrome or a stadium. The building costs of both, their maintenance over the years, and the financing of the games posed a heavy burden on the city and its institutions, and for this reason building two structures in one locale was avoided in ancient Palestine, as in most other cities of the empire. Nor was the urban layout large enough to accommodate two monumental structures, especially together with the other public buildings that stood in the city.

Herod the Great found a creative solution in Caesarea Maritima by constructing a hippo-stadium, a multifunctional building that could accommodate a variety of shows during the games he initiated in the city in honor of Augustus. In the ensuing period, other cities in the region adopted the king's architectural model of the hippodrome for their chariot races and athletic competitions.

The hippodromes in second- and third-century CE Palestine and comparable buildings in the cities of the Decapolis and Arabia had several features in common; like other imperial buildings, their architectural layout was inspired by the Circus Maximus in Rome, which was rebuilt by Trajan.¹³⁵ Each was a rectangular structure with a semicircle (*sphendone*) on one of its short sides and the chariots' starting gates (*carceres*) at the opposite end. A low barrier (*euripus*) decorated with various features ran down the middle of the hippodrome, dividing the track on which the



FIGURE 2.14 Gerasa, the hippodrome, looking south (photo by Zeev Weiss).

charioteers made their laps. A tiered seating area (*cavea*) encompassed the track, except on the side where the starting gates were located.

The Cavea. Some hippodromes were built adjacent to a natural slope on which the foundations of the *cavea* were partially constructed. In the Herodian buildings, the rows of seats were constructed against a massive 9-meter wall, whereas in the imperial hippodromes they were supported by the transverse walls of the chambers that bore sloping barrel-vaults running at a right angle to the arena. In most cases, these rooms were left empty, although some served as entrances and others were utilized for shops and local industries.

The hippodrome was entered via a monumental entrance in the center of the semicircular side of the building, through which the public proceeded into the arena and from there climbed steps directly into the *cavea* (Figure 2.14). Additional entranceways—*vomitoria*—were built into the barrel-vaulted chambers at fixed intervals around the building.

In some chambers there were steps that led to the upper rows of the *cavea*. In others, two stairways were built antithetically into the podium wall, from which one proceeded to the lower rows of the *cavea*. Openings in the podium wall gave access to the latter stairways from the arena as well. The number of entrances and stairways of both types differs from one hippodrome to the next in ancient Palestine.¹³⁶

The tiers of seats in the *cavea* were arranged in a continuous line along the length of the building and were divided into vertical blocks with stairways running between them.¹³⁷ In the imperial circuses, a colonnaded gallery was usually found around the top of the tiers of seats, where crowds would rest between the races or find shelter on hot or rainy days.¹³⁸ Two tribunal boxes, or platforms, were installed parallel to each other on either side of the *cavea*. Their design in the imperial hippodromes was inspired by the Circus Maximus and were designated for local dignitaries; it is from there that prizes were awarded to the winners of the events. The platforms were located at some distance from the *sphendone*, about one-third down the length of the hippodrome, and one of them was built at the finishing line of the racecourse.¹³⁹ Beneath the northern platform in Scythopolis were two chambers that were entered from the arena. A similar chamber was added at some point on the eastern side of the hippo-stadium in Caesarea, and in it some marble objects were found—four votive feet and a plaque bearing a Greek inscription, “Myrismos (the) charioteer.”¹⁴⁰

The Arena and the Euripus. The arena, leveled sometimes with special bedding beneath the floor, was used for competitions and races. It was surrounded on three sides by a podium wall (averaging 1–2 m high) located at the lower end of the *cavea*, below the rows of seats. The podium wall enclosing the arena was intended primarily to prevent the galloping horses on the racecourse from accidentally crashing into the crowds of spectators in the hippodrome.

Large racecourses comparable in size to imperial circuses stood in Caesarea (east, 90 × 450 m) and Bostra (97 × 420 m). The dimensions of the other known hippodromes were more modest, commensurate

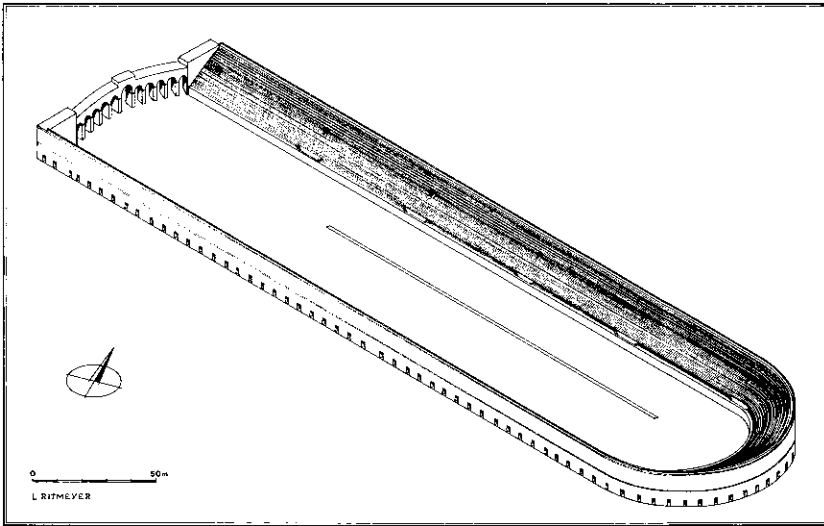


FIGURE 2.15 Neapolis, reconstruction of the hippodrome (courtesy of Staff Officer of Archaeology—Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria, following Yitzhak Magen, *Flavia Neapolis: Shechem in the Roman Period*, Judea and Samaria Publications 11, vol. 1 [Jerusalem: Staff Officer of Archaeology—Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria, Israel Antiquities Authority, 2009]), 177, fig. 4.45).

with the size of the building's exterior—in Caesarea (hippo-stadium, 50×300 m), Neapolis (49×270 m), and Gerasa (50×244 m) (Figure 2.15). The racecourse of the hippodrome in Scythopolis was about 50 meters wide, and it seems that its length did not differ greatly from that of the latter buildings. The width of the racecourses in these four buildings is identical but not coincidental, as this is the minimal dimension that first appeared in the hippo-stadium that Herod built in Caesarea, which enabled chariot and horse races in the Greek tradition as well as athletic competitions to be held in the same building.

The low barrier (*euripus*) dividing the course in the Roman hippodrome deviates slightly from the long axis of the building in order to provide all the charioteers on the racecourse an equal opportunity to reach the turning post closest to the starting gates.¹⁴¹ The *euripus*, comprising two parallel walls, was decorated with basins (pools containing

water), statues, columns, and an obelisk. The turning posts at both ends of the *euripus* had a semicircular face, sometimes detached from the main body of the barrier. Three closely set vertical cones (*metae*), each crowned by a small object resembling an egg, stood on a podium or platform to mark the turning points. The far turning post, near the *sphendone*, is called the *meta prima*, as this post is where the charioteers made their first turn around the *euripus*. The other end, that which is close to the *carceres*, is called the *meta secunda*.

Evidence for the *euripus* in the hippodromes of ancient Palestine is fairly meager, even though their existence is irrefutable. Impressive sections of the original *euripus* have been preserved in the eastern hippodrome in Caesarea, primarily at its southern end—the *meta prima*, a number of pools with marble revetments, parts of conical columns that stood at the turning posts, and three large fragments of a red granite obelisk that stood in the center of the *euripus* (Figure 6.5).¹⁴²

There were less massive *euripi* in other hippodromes, but this simplified architectural feature fulfilled the same purpose. In Gerasa in the Decapolis, the partially preserved *euripus* held three basins, while three stones with sockets to hold wooden posts were positioned at either end to indicate the turning points on the racecourse (Figure 2.16).¹⁴³ The barrier in Gerasa, located at a considerable distance from the *carceres*, confirms the plan of other imperial hippodromes, where the right-hand racecourse was widened to provide equal entry for every charioteer emerging from the *carceres* onto the track.¹⁴⁴

The chariot races held in honor of King Solomon, as described in a late midrash, also inform us of the decorated *euripus* and its function in the hippodrome: “And what was the length of the hippodrome? Three parasangs (Persian miles) by three parasangs, and one parasang on each narrow side. Within it were two rows encompassed by grilles ornamented with all sorts of animals and birds, and around them the horses and runners who had run around them eight times a day.”¹⁴⁵ The dimensions of the hippodrome and the number of laps in each race seem to have been exaggerated but nevertheless preserve the realistic proportions of a long and narrow rectangular building as well as a good idea of

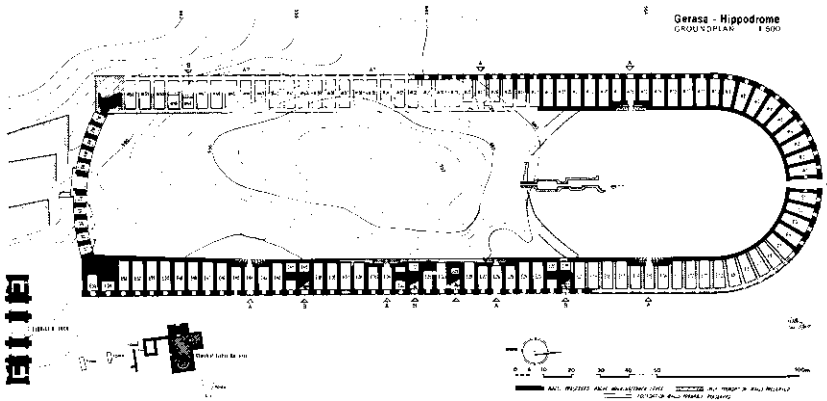


FIGURE 2.16 Gerasa, plan of the hippodrome, with the *euripus* in the center of the arena (courtesy of Institut français du Proche-Orient, following Antoni A. Ostrasz, “The Hippodrome of Gerasa: A Report on Excavations and Research 1982–1987,” *Syria* 66 [1989]: 57, fig. 3).

the nature of the competitions held there. The description of the barrier as comprising two parallel lines—a fence and perhaps also columns, as well as animals and birds decorating it—surrounded by charioteers in the race, is not far from the contemporary reality. Whoever conceived this description was familiar from up close with the building and the races held in them and knew how to express other ideas through them. The account provides yet another perspective of the building, which continued to be used for chariot races in Palestine throughout late antiquity.

The Starting Gates (Carceres). The *carceres* and starting line, from where the charioteers began the race in the Roman circus, were built on the short side of the building, opposite the *sphendone*. The stalls—one for each charioteer—were arranged in a mild curve across the narrow width of the building, in the space between the two sides of the *cavea*. In its center was a monumental gate flanked on each side by five or six stalls, depending on the width of the arena.¹⁴⁶ The distance between the *carceres* and the white line, which marked the place where all the

chariots left their assigned lanes and lined up for the inside position near the *meta secunda*, was not equal. This is especially true with regard to the outer stalls, located to the left of the *meta secunda*. In order to close this gap and allow equal entrance for all the charioteers, the outer stalls of the *carceres* in the Roman circus were built on a mild curve that deviated slightly inward, toward the arena. This solution was applied in one way or another in all the hippodromes known in the region (Figure 2.16).¹⁴⁷

The *carceres* in the hippodromes of ancient Palestine and in the cities of the Decapolis are not well preserved, but many details relating to the layout of their internal space, decoration, and function have been revealed in the course of excavations. The façade of the *carceres* was decorated with engaged columns or pilasters, sometimes crowned with simple moldings between the stalls on the side facing the arena. The roof of the *carceres* was horizontal, sometimes protruding slightly above the monumental gate and on which several decorative elements were placed. In Gerasa, several altars with inscriptions were placed above the eastern half of the *carceres* (Figure 2.17). In the hippo-stadium in Caesarea, fragments of a slightly larger-than-life-size bronze statue of a charioteer were found near the center of the *carceres*; according to the proposed reconstruction, this statue stood above the monumental gate.¹⁴⁸

In Gerasa, where both ends of the *carceres* meet the *cavea* were towers with staircases leading up to the roof.¹⁴⁹ A special box was built in the imperial circus over the center of the *carceres*, above the monumental gate, from where the magistrate or some other important person threw the *mappa*, a white kerchief which, when it fell to the ground, signaled the opening of the gates. It is probable that, despite the lack of archaeological corroboration, a similar box, inspired by the imperial model, was built in the hippodromes of ancient Palestine to serve the same purpose.

The *carceres* in the Circus Maximus in Rome, which is often depicted in ancient art, had twelve stalls, each having an arched opening that closed with a wooden door and above which, near the arch, was a metal grille. Upon the starting signal, all the doors opened outward simultaneously with the help of a mechanism and a sophisticated rope system that



FIGURE 2.17 Gerasa, the reconstructed *carceres* of the hippodrome. The monumental gate in the center is flanked on either side by five stalls (photo by Zeev Weiss).

connected the doors of all the stalls, thereby permitting a fair race for all the charioteers.¹⁵⁰ Slots cut into the bases of the stalls, recesses, and vertical grooves in the doorjambs, as well as various holes that left their mark on some stones in several hippodromes, accommodated the wooden jambs that held the doors of each stall or chamber. Such an arrangement may allude to the existence of similar operating devices in the hippodromes of the Decapolis as well.¹⁵¹

Very little is known about specific structures that may have stood near the hippodrome to facilitate the preparations for the competitions and races. Stables stood north of the hippodrome in late antique Caesarea, not far from the *carceres*, where a Greek inscription was found mentioning the *hippotrophoi*—special officials responsible for maintaining the stables. The building was never excavated, but it is probable that the inscription was affixed to one of the walls in the clubhouse.¹⁵² The managers in the stables of the Caesarean hippodrome, where the racehorses

were kept and cared for, were well known and referred to in one Jewish mystical text as a metaphor to describe the enormity of the fiery horses of heaven: “and the measure of the (content of the) mouth of each horse is (the content of) three mangers such as the manger of Caesarea.”¹⁵³

While the architectural layout of the hippodromes in ancient Palestine was inspired by Rome’s Circus Maximus, in which the width of the arena ranges between 70 and 80 meters, these structures otherwise followed two primary models—in the small buildings the arena averaged 50 meters wide, and in the large buildings, a width of 90 meters or more.¹⁵⁴ The diversity of the buildings in the region is not confined only to the width of the arena, from which the number of stalls in the *carceres* and the number of participants in the competition was determined, but also gained expression in the other components of the building that had a direct impact on the nature of the races held in each locale. The varying number of stalls in the hippodromes of ancient Palestine and Arabia differs from what is known in other Roman circuses, especially in the West, where the chariot races were held in a fixed format of four parties and twelve stalls. The distance between the *carceres* and the *meta secunda* in the hippodromes of ancient Palestine, the length of the arena, and the size of the *euripus*, which the charioteers encircled seven times, also differed from building to building. These certainly influenced the length of the track and the time it took to complete a race, suggesting that the competitions had to be conducted differently in almost every hippodrome. The versatile nature of the local hippodrome gave additional expression to the special, less rigid, character of the competitions held in the region, where the chariot races, at least until the fifth century CE, were not restricted to certain teams or factions but were open to everyone, and the number of competitors at each and every venue was not fixed.

C. The Amphitheater

Gladiatorial combats and animal baiting in the amphitheater were particularly popular in the Roman period.¹⁵⁵ Josephus tells us that Herod

built the first amphitheaters in the region; however, a study of the historical and archaeological data from the Herodian period indicates, as mentioned earlier, that he built hippo-stadia—and not Roman-style amphitheaters—which he also designated for gladiatorial combats and animal baiting. Only in the second century CE were oval amphitheaters erected in ancient Palestine, following the well-known Roman model. Such edifices were found in only four locales in the region—three in western Palestine (Caesarea Maritima, Eleutheropolis, and Legio) and only one in Transjordan (Bostra) (Figure 2.18).¹⁵⁶

Only a few buildings in the region were modified for performances resembling those held in the amphitheater, although they were built on a scale that could accommodate a relatively different capacity. Other than at Gadara, where the orchestra in the northern theater was converted into an oval arena in the early fourth century CE by using construction materials taken from dismantled *scaenae*, no other theater in the region widened its orchestra, lowered its level, and built a high podium around it, as was done in the Greek world (Figure 2.19).¹⁵⁷ At Scythopolis,



FIGURE 2.18 Eleutheropolis, exterior view of the amphitheater (photo by Zeev Weiss).



FIGURE 2.19 Gadara, the northern theater, in which the orchestra was converted into an oval arena in the early fourth century (courtesy of Claudia Bührig).

rectangular holes for wooden poles were found carved at fixed intervals above the podium located at the bottom of the *cavea*, in the *aditus maximus*, and on the sides of the stage. These may have been used to support a protective net for the spectators during the amphitheatrical performances held in the orchestra.¹⁵⁸

Most evidence comes from several hippodromes in ancient Palestine that were modified to accommodate amphitheatrical performances. The semi-circular end of several buildings—the hippo-stadium in Caesarea as well as the hippodromes in Neapolis, Scythopolis, and Gerasa—were foreshortened and converted into an oval structure, an amphitheater, although different construction methods were used at almost every site (Figure 2.20).¹⁵⁹

At first glance, the new oval shape of these four buildings resembles a Roman amphitheater.¹⁶⁰ Although this may suggest that amphitheatrical performances were occasionally held in some other cities of ancient Palestine, each and every case must be evaluated separately and in comparison to similar phenomena in the region and beyond, before reaching any

overall conclusions. For instance, the well-constructed semicircular wall across the arena at Neapolis resembles the changes introduced in Scythopolis, while the same wall in Caesarea and Gerasa is poorly built and looks more like a barrier meant to fence off one side of the building (Figure 2.16). The conversion of the buildings in Scythopolis and Gerasa, as well as the alterations made in the northern theater in Gadara, seem to resemble the modifications made in Neapolis and the hippo-stadium in Caesarea. However, chronologically speaking, these changes did not occur in all these places simultaneously. The provisional walls of the hippo-stadium in Caesarea were built for specific occasions in the course of the third century CE, while the heavy construction in Neapolis is dated to the second half of the third or early fourth century. Modifications were made in Gadara sometime in the early fourth century, in Scythopolis by the mid-fourth century or even later, and in Gerasa in the second half of the fourth century.¹⁶¹

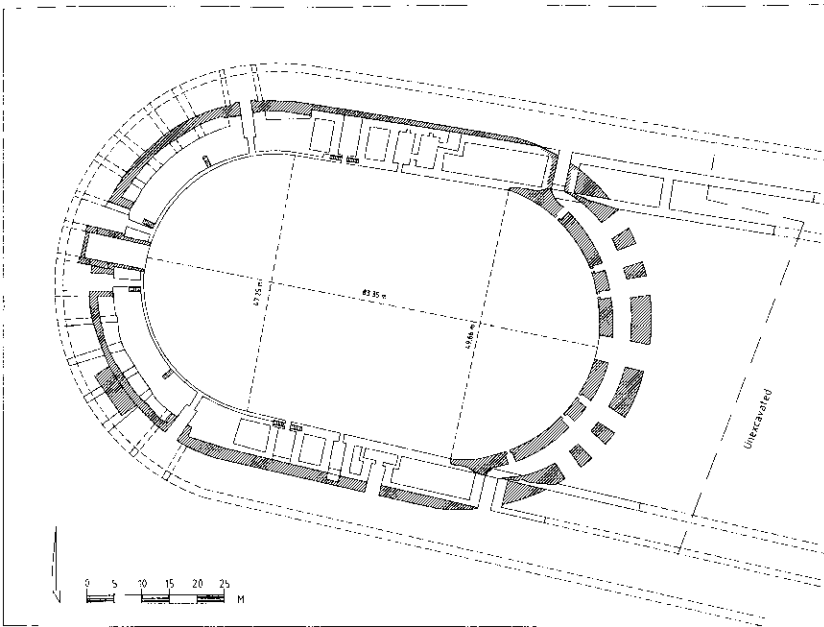


FIGURE 2.20 Scythopolis, plan of the amphitheater built over the hippodrome in the mid-fourth century (courtesy of Yoram Tsafrir).

The modifications made in some of the buildings of ancient Palestine and in the cities of the Decapolis certainly reflect changes in the cultural habits of the local population; however, it is not clear what caused the abandonment of the local hippodrome for amphitheatrical shows. Several theories prevail: it may reflect the local population's growing preference for gladiatorial combats and animal baiting over chariot races and athletic competitions; the economic situation of some cities in the third century CE that could not bear the burdensome expenses and were forced to abandon chariot races;¹⁶² the fulfillment of local needs—as in Caesarea, where the foreshortening of the hippo-stadium is ascribed to persecutions in the city in the third century CE;¹⁶³ or perhaps the fact that one section of the hippodrome—in Gerasa, for example—was somehow damaged while the local municipality decided to utilize the other part of the building for other performances.¹⁶⁴ Not all these explanations are applicable everywhere, but it should be noted that the conversion of these buildings continued in the region for over a century, and in some cities even when gladiatorial combats no longer appealed to the masses.

The Architecture of the Amphitheater. The size of the amphitheater in ancient Palestine differs from site to site, but all of them more or less keep to the oval shape of the Roman model. The amphitheater in Eleutheropolis—the smallest such building (56 × 71 m) known in the region—is estimated to have held five thousand seats. In Caesarea, the amphitheater was an especially large building (100 × 125 m) that could hold twenty thousand spectators. The amphitheater in Bostra in Arabia, only partially excavated, is slightly smaller than the former (75 × 120 m), while the building in Legio, known only from the survey, is close in its dimensions (52 × 71 m) to the one in Eleutheropolis. The width of the buildings that were converted into amphitheaters was determined by the size of the hippodrome, and the length varied according to the conditions and local needs. The dimensions of the building in Neapolis were 76 by 96 meters and were similar in Gerasa (76 × 92 m) and slightly larger than those in Scythopolis (68 × 120 m).

The foundations of the *cavea* in the amphitheater of ancient Palestine were built on various types of vaults, as was common in the Roman world, at times by making use of the natural slope or riverbed, at times by digging into the surface level on which it was partly built. The seats in the *cavea* have not been preserved in their entirety in any building, but it is estimated that in Eleutheropolis there were nine to eleven rows, in Scythopolis nine to twelve, and in Neapolis about twenty. It is also assumed that stairways (*scalaria*) divided the *cavea* into several vertical blocks (*cunei*), while the tiers may have been horizontally divided into two sections.

Two rectangular boxes (*tribunalia*), identical in size, were built symmetrically on either side of the *cavea* on the wide axis of the building. They were usually placed in the lower sections of the *cavea*, above the podium wall encompassing the arena. *Tribunalia* for distinguished guests are well known in the architecture of the Roman amphitheater and were discovered in Eleutheropolis and Scythopolis, and in the hippodrome in Caesarea. Two inscriptions found in the amphitheater in Caesarea referring to decurions of the colony may suggest that additional seats were reserved in the *cavea* for dignitaries.¹⁶⁵ Beneath the western box in Eleutheropolis was a rectangular chapel (*sacellum*) for rituals, which the gladiators used before entering the arena.¹⁶⁶

The *vomitoria* leading into the *cavea* were incorporated at fixed intervals around the building and differed in number from site to site. Some of them led to the lower rows of the *cavea*, and others contained stairways reaching its upper tiers. Two straight barrel-vaulted entrances were located on either side of the amphitheater's long axis, through which the procession entered directly into the arena at the opening of the games (Figure 2.2). The one that faced the city was probably the *porta triumphalis*, through which the gladiators paraded into the arena at the beginning of the show, and the other, facing away from the city, was the *porta libitinensis*, from which the dead and wounded gladiators were carried out of the building.¹⁶⁷

The amphitheater in ancient Palestine, like the Roman building, had an oval arena that varied in size from place to place. The natural terrain

was leveled without adding special bedding and made suitable for games in the arena. A high podium (average size: 3.5 m) at the bottom of the *cavea* encompassed the arena and served as a protective barrier for the spectators during the shows (Figure 2.21). The podium in the hippo-stadium in Caesarea was not especially high, and therefore the level of the arena was made deeper and wooden uprights to support nets were installed to protect the spectators.¹⁶⁸ The podium was decorated with wall paintings and a variety of patterns, remnants of which were discovered in Eleutheropolis and Scythopolis, but they were better preserved in the several plaster layers in the hippo-stadium in Caesarea. One such layer displayed a row of large-size animals, including an elephant, rhinoceros, panther, deer, wolf, and wild boar—and perhaps even a gladiator—against a background of schematic vegetation; in a covering layer, colorful marble-like panels were found. These decorations, and possibly other objects that may have stood in the arena, created the atmosphere of a wild landscape befitting the nature of the hunting performances held there (Figure 3.9).¹⁶⁹



FIGURE 2.21 Eleutheropolis, the arena surrounded by a protective podium. *On the left*: the main entrance into the arena. *On the right*: part of the subterranean rooms (*hypogea*) (photo by Zeev Weiss).

In Caesarea and Eleutheropolis, as in every Roman amphitheater, there were subterranean galleries (*hypogea*) from which the animals emerged and lunged into the arena. Two vaulted corridors, located on the long and short axes of the building in Eleutheropolis, converged in the center of the arena. Eight shafts were built along the corridors, in some of which there were perhaps even wooden devices with ropes (*pegmata*) for hoisting the animals into the arena.¹⁷⁰

With the introduction of public performances, competitions, and spectacles during the reign of Herod the Great, the region entered a new era. The number of buildings for mass entertainment in ancient Palestine and the pace of construction after the king's death and in the first centuries CE were the result of the cities' ability to cover building expenses and provide performances. The urban landscape in this period, shaped by the presence of monumental structures that would be populated by large crowds, radically changed the face of ancient Palestine. The plans of the theater, hippodrome, and amphitheater, the building materials that were used to construct them, and the architectural decorations and freestanding sculptures that adorned the various buildings were, more often than not, similar to what was found in the neighboring cities or in faraway provinces. Rome did not force architectural codes on the inhabitants of the provinces, but instead managed to create, and most impressively, a cultural *koine* in which most of the people living in the vicinity of the Mediterranean Basin participated. The construction of various buildings within a city's boundaries and holding a range of performances in them enabled the local citizens to share the cultural habit that prevailed within the limits of the empire, thereby also giving expression to their loyalty to and sociocultural identity with the ruling power. This change did not occur overnight. It was a long process whose cultural and architectural impact became stronger in the course of the first centuries CE.

Much money, thought, and labor were invested in these monumental buildings, and it may be assumed that the local inhabitants felt great pride in witnessing their dedication. The impression gained at that time

was undoubtedly one of great power, but what constituted a real attraction in the eyes of many for many years were the performances held in them, and not the buildings. Ancient Palestine expressed a clear preference for the Greek traditions prevailing in the Graeco-Roman East—theater performances, athletic competitions, and chariot races—and the number of buildings designated for these events is commensurate with this predilection. In contrast, although gladiatorial combats and animal baiting gained great popularity at the time, their appearance in the arena was more limited. Launching a variety of shows in the city greatly affected the daily life and behavior of the local population, creating an interesting cultural *mélange*—albeit disparate in its nature—between East and West. This combination, appearing also in other realms of life, constitutes an important component of Graeco-Roman culture that gradually grew in the imperial era and was eventually embraced by many cities in the Roman East.

3

Entertaining the Crowds: Performances, Competitions, and Shows

HEROD THE GREAT was the first to establish competitions in ancient Palestine. These events were based largely on Hellenic tradition, which included agonistic contests, competitions in the performing arts, and horse and chariot races into which the king also introduced Roman spectacles. Alongside the official festivals and games conducted at regular intervals and according to a fixed program were performances and competitions for pure entertainment held throughout the empire. These included an assortment of scenic performances, chariot races, and amphitheatrical shows conducted on various occasions and intended to amuse the masses.

With the introduction of public entertainment in ancient Palestine, the local population became familiar with the assorted performances, competitions, and shows held in the theaters, hippodromes, and amphitheaters, and over time the demand for such performances grew. When entering any of these buildings, the public knew what to expect and responded accordingly. They attended the shows early enough to get a good seat according to their social rank and spent almost the entire day there, watching the various shows with enjoyment. The buildings were filled with large audiences, as we read in John Chrysostom's description of the

theater in Antioch: “All the people are sitting aloft presenting a splendid sight and composed of numberless faces, so that many times the very rafters and roof above are hidden by human bodies. You can see neither tiles nor stones, but all is men’s bodies and faces.”⁷¹ People from all social classes attended the shows, often witnessing the ceremonial entrance of dignitaries—local magistrates, the governor of the province, and at times even the emperor himself—who honored the performances with their presence. John Chrysostom describes this distinctively powerful moment in detail: “Then, as the ambitious man who has brought them together enters in the sight of all, they stand up and as from a single mouth cry out. All with one voice call him protector and ruler of their common city and stretch out their hands in salutation.”⁷² Familiar with this practice, the rabbis, too, refer in several homilies to dignitaries entering local buildings for entertainment who pass before the crowds congesting the *cavea* area.⁷³ Some rabbis refer to the king—be it the emperor, governor, or local magistrates—as a spectator, a benefactor who had the power to intervene, resolve, and separate the contestants.⁷⁴

The enthusiasm at the shows was great. The masses laughed at the performances, became excited at the races and agitated by the killing in the arena. The crowds were usually noisy, loud, and derisive, cheering and calling out encouraging remarks to the contestants, and also whistling contemptuously when they did not like the show. Dio Chrysostom refers to the terrible noise, bustle, shouting, and awful curses heard in the stadium in Alexandria during the horse races held there.⁷⁵ Tertullian, too, describes with no less vivid colors the vulgar behavior of the populace attending the Roman circus.⁷⁶ The boisterous behavior of the local populace gathering in the buildings for mass entertainment in ancient Palestine also gains notoriety in some rabbinic sources. According to R. Abbahu, for example, the people of Caesarea “sit and eat and drink and get drunk, they sit and talk about me and mock me” in the theater or circus in their city.⁷⁷ Other sources allude to the shouting and cheering of spectators during competitions.⁷⁸

Familiarity with the nature and rules of the various shows in antiquity was essential for the crowd that sought refuge in them from the trials and

tribulations of their daily lives. We have already reviewed the various buildings for mass entertainment in the region; this chapter will provide a comprehensive discussion of the types of performances, competitions, and shows that were held in these buildings. Our presentation will not offer an overall description of the events held in the cities of ancient Palestine, the Decapolis, and Arabia (see below, Chap. 4), but will focus on performances, contests, and shows individually, examining various aspects of each, along with their cultural origins, while presenting the evidence for their existence in the region over the years.

Theaters were the most common buildings; every city had at least one such edifice, and their total number throughout the country undoubtedly attests to the popularity and frequency of theatrical shows. It is therefore appropriate to open our discussion with the theatrical performances. It will continue with the athletic and horse-and-chariot races conducted in the hippodrome, and conclude with the spectacles held in the amphitheater. The detailed discussions of the various types of performances will show that each followed a pattern known elsewhere in the Roman world. Only after reviewing all the data and evaluating the activities held in the region over time will it be possible to assess the cultural tastes and proclivities of the local population, which, in fact, represents a blend of East and West.

A. Theatrical Performances

The theatrical shows that drew audiences of thousands throughout the Roman Empire were especially popular in ancient Palestine, judging by the large number of buildings that sprang up in the country from the first through third centuries CE. The local populace attended a variety of performances in the local theaters, and cities boasting more than one such building might have featured several performances at once. In Chapter 2, it was suggested that the larger building, the “theater,” was used for theatrical performances, while the smaller structure, the *odeon*, was designated for concerts, recitals, and singing. This was a logical but not hard-and-fast division, and there was some flexibility in choosing

the venue of a performance. Theatrical performances were held regularly on the theater stage, as this was the primary designation of this large and spacious building, but some combat sports, acrobatics, and juggling acts were also occasionally held there, as well as social and political conventions relating to Roman municipal affairs.⁹

Our knowledge of the competitions and performances held on the stages of ancient Palestine is based on very sparse information culled from literary sources and inscriptions, much of which is ambiguous, short, and difficult to interpret. By examining the evidence from ancient Palestine in its wider context, it is possible to gain important insight into the nature of the performances held on the local stage.

The Mime

The mime held a prime place on the theater stage of the Roman Empire, including the Eastern provinces, in the first centuries CE and throughout late antiquity. One such performer, named “Amazonios *biologos*” (“speaker of life”), is mentioned in a burial inscription from Bostra.¹⁰ A long inscription incised on the pedestal of a statue erected in the southern theater of Gerasa in honor of Titus Flavius Gerrenus, that city’s first *agônothetês*, suggests that mime performances were held there from the early second century CE (Figure 4.1).¹¹ Tyre and Berytus were praised for their excellent mimes.¹² Caesarea held mime performances in the early fourth century CE.¹³ Choricus, a teacher and rhetor in Gaza, extolled the mime in the early sixth century in his *Apologia Mimorum* as having a calming effect on the crowds between races in the hippodrome, relieving them from the stress, discord, and hardship of everyday life.¹⁴ He alludes to the mime performances in great detail, specifying that in his day such shows took place in Caesarea’s theater as well. Actors presented mime plays, presumably in the theater in nearby Shuni-Maiumas, during an annual festival organized by the city’s inhabitants in the presence of the local governor.¹⁵ The rabbis’ reference to the mime on several occasions (see below) clearly indicates the prevalence of this type of show in the region.¹⁶

Mime performances first appeared in the Roman theater at the end of the third century BCE. Originally, they took place in the orchestra, while other, more dramatic, genres were conducted on the stage. The mime gained popularity at the end of the Republic, and later on, during the empire and throughout late antiquity, it occupied a central place among stage performances. It was a versatile and multifaceted dramatic form that provided basic entertainment in an everyday setting and comments on current issues. Performances of mime included some dramatic moments, a mixture of spoken and sung dialogue, as well as movement, dance, mimicry, acrobatics, clowns, jokes, magic tricks, and erotic shows performed by a troupe of unmasked actors accompanied at times by music and a chorus.¹⁷ Facial expressions, gesticulations, and general expressiveness had an important role in the mime, whereas its discourse was short, flexible, and largely improvised to suit the mood of the audience. The themes used in mime were taken from everyday village or town life—adultery, romance, social satire, mythology, and religion—or refer to contemporary circumstances and individuals. Some plays are known by name: *Venus and Adonis*, *Leda and the Swan*, *Anubis the Adulterer*, and the *Three Ravenous Herculeses*.¹⁸ Choricus lists some of the typical characters of the mime: “master, servants, merchants, sausage sellers, bakers, cooks, banqueters, contract makers, stammering child, youth in love, an angry man, another man calming him down.”¹⁹

Some rich and colorful mosaics found in late antique Palestine and Arabia offer a glimpse into the leisure culture that prevailed in the region. Found primarily in private spaces, they portray a range of mythological themes, some of which are repeated, with variations, at several sites. The themes most beloved of the mosaicists are precisely those employed by the mimes and, according to Glen Bowersock, serve as “some kind of reflection of the immensely popular mime theater of late antiquity.”²⁰ Procopius’s *ekphrasis eikonos*, a verbal description of a painting cycle in Gaza, illustrates the two main episodes in the Euripidean tragedy *Hippolytus*. One of the scenes described by the orator in Gaza appears also in late fifth- and early sixth-century mosaics from Sheikh Zuweid and Madaba, portraying the meeting between Hippolytus and



FIGURE 3.1 Sepphoris, the Nile Festival Building, mosaic portraying dancing Amazons (photo by Gabi Laron).

the elderly nursemaid, the deliverer of Phaedra's amorous proposal.²¹ Another panel in the Sheikh Zuweid mosaic depicts a Dionysiac procession, whereas in the Madaba mosaic Adonis, Aphrodite, and fluttering Erotes appear just above the scene of Phaedra and Hippolytus. Heracles, Achilles, and Patroklos are known elsewhere in Madaba, while Dionysiac themes find expression here, in Gerasa, and at the small site of Erez near Gaza. The story of Odysseus and the Sirens is portrayed in a panel of a larger mosaic carpet that embellishes a Jewish private dwelling in Scythopolis. In Sepphoris, a mosaic of dancing Amazons may portray an actual performance of the story of Penthesilea departing for the battle in which Achilles killed her (Figure 3.1).²² Some of these colorful scenes, deriving from the Greek tragedy, reflect the cultural tastes of the affluent citizens in the region, but they may also testify to the prominent role of mime theater in portraying mythological themes on the local stage for larger audiences.

The mime, being a secular art form, took a critical and derisive look at religion. Parodies of the gods were often a subject for presentation, as was the mockery of Jews and Judaism and, in the course of time, Christianity.²³ R. Abbahu, who lived in Caesarea in the early fourth century, referred to a short mime performance that originally consisted of a few acts and was probably popular among this Roman city's inhabitants, who habitually made fun of the Jews and their customs of keeping the Sabbath and observing the sabbatical year:

"They who sit in the gate talk about me" (Ps. 69:13). This refers to the nations of the world who sit in theaters and circuses. "And the drunkards make songs about me" (ibid.). Since they sit and eat and drink and get drunk, they sit and talk about me and mock me, saying: "We don't have to eat carobs, like the Jews." And they ask one another: "How long do you want to live?" and one replies: "Like a Jew's shirt on the Sabbath." They then bring a camel into their theaters, dress them with his shirts, and ask one another, "Why is he (the camel) mourning?"—to which one replies: "The Jews observe the law of the sabbatical year and they have no vegetables, so they eat this camel's thorns, and that is why he is in mourning." And they introduce the mime into their theater with a shaven head. And they say to one another: "Why is his head shaven?" And one replies: "These Jews observe the Sabbath." And all they toil for throughout the week they eat on the Sabbath. They have no wood to cook on, so they break up their beds and cook on them. And they sleep on the ground rolling in the dust, and therefore must cover themselves with oil, which is why oil is expensive. And apparently this is why his head was shaven, because he could not afford to "wash" his hair with oil; so instead, for the sake of hygiene, he shaved off all his hair.²⁴

The mime preserved in Rabbi Abbahu's sermon is composed of several discourses between two actors around one theme that develops as the performance progresses. The scene opens with a question directed at one of the actors: "How long do you want to live?" And he replies: "Like a Jew's shirt on the Sabbath." The Sabbath shirt is a garment the Jew

wears only once a week and therefore does not wear out quickly.²⁵ The actor thereby expresses his wish to live a long life, however at the same time he mocks a Sabbath custom of the Jews. Next, a camel comes on-stage wearing his shirts.²⁶ At the sight of the camel wearing what is perceived to be a shroud, one of the actors asks why he is wearing this garment, and the other explains that in the sabbatical year Jews are forbidden to cultivate the land and must get their food from elsewhere, and in this case have even stolen the thorns that the camel eats, which is why the animal is mourning. In the next scene, another actor with a shaven head enters, a “mime,” in R. Abbahu’s words.²⁷ Here, too, one of the actors asks, “Why is his head shaven?”—to which another actor replies with a long story of how it is the custom of the Jews to honor the Sabbath by using all their money to prepare for it—which ultimately leaves them penniless, forcing them to sleep on the ground the entire week. The increased consumption of oil by the Jews to anoint their bodies is the reason why the price of oil is high, and therefore he prefers to shave his head to prevent scabs from forming.

Life in a mixed city such as Caesarea was fraught with tension between different sectors of the population. The theater stage served as an outlet for alleviating this tension, and the mime was a fine tool for this purpose. Performances such as the one described above in R. Abbahu’s sermon, ridiculing Jews and Jewish customs, were occasionally staged in the theaters throughout the Roman world in the first centuries CE. Philo repeatedly mentions the mime who mocked and scorned the Jews.²⁸ Some of Juvenal’s first-century CE satires criticizing the Jews might have served as inspirational material for mime performances held in Rome.²⁹ The Jewish embassy that came before Hadrian after the revolt in the last days of Trajan refers to mime performances mocking the king of the Jews in Alexandria.³⁰ A papyrus from Egypt contains a mime concerning a Jewish athlete who was active in the Greek gymnasium, in which the actor portraying the Jew appeared carrying a “Jewish load.”³¹ If we are to rely on our sources, the mime performances in Alexandria, Rome, and Caesarea reflect a particular attitude of Roman society toward the Jews and Judaism in the first centuries CE. The Jews were not different from

other minorities in Roman society in this regard. Comparable to modern-day stand-up comedians, mimes singled out ethnic or religious groups in society as targets for their techniques of derision; they did so with the Christians as well as with some Indian figures or Goths whose customs and lifestyles provoked a similar response. In our case, however, it is difficult to determine the precise circumstances of the mime embedded in R. Abbahu's sermon. Was it merely an anti-Jewish outburst in Caesarea, or was it a spontaneous reaction to certain Jewish customs?³² Even though this question remains unanswered, it is clear that the material used for this mime—observance of the Sabbath and the sabbatical year—was well known in R. Abbahu's time and served the mime well in his mockery of the Jews and their customs.

Other details embedded in the sermon correspond with what is known about mime performances held elsewhere on the Roman stage and also provide additional information about the nature of these shows in the region. Two or three actors, and at times even more, participated in the mime, a genre in which women appeared onstage for the first time in the ancient world. In some mimes, the leading actor was accompanied by a supporting actor with a shaven head who portrayed the fool (*mōros*); he walked behind the lead, conducted a conversation with him, and mimicked whatever he said while distorting the information.³³ The fool, who had an important role in R. Abbahu's mime, was included in a list of stock theater images in another talmudic pericope (see below). This character, portrayed at times as having impaired comprehension, would ask for a clarification of phenomena he had witnessed during a performance or an explanation of matters said onstage; this was done in fast dialogue containing deliberate misunderstandings, puns, and wordplays, all of which were typical mime techniques. The leading actor would come to his aid by offering him an explanation. Such a format is embedded in R. Abbahu's sermon and may suggest, in addition to the details discussed earlier, that the rabbi based his sermon on a mime performance known in his day. Each of the actors in this play identified with his role onstage. The fool asked the leading actor questions—why did the camel wear a shirt? why was his head shaven?—while the latter's answers,

although short, as was characteristic of a sermon, were nevertheless pertinent to the main point of the mime. The short answers suffice for the purposes of the sermon, but it is probable that the dialogues in the original play were longer and very entertaining for the spectators in the theater in Caesarea.

The mime actors appeared onstage barefoot, unmasked, and wearing a colorful patchwork tunic (*centuculus*) or a short cloak with a square hood (*ricinium*) designed to suit the nature of the play.³⁴ Sometimes it was the role of another actor in the performance to portray the figure on which the play hinged. His appearance, dress, or an object of significance that he carried served as familiar symbols with which the audience could identify and helped them understand the figure, story, and entire play.³⁵ The actors' direct or indirect reference to the figure wandering onstage was one of the ways in which the mime conveyed his satire and criticism. Some of the mime performances mentioned earlier used a similar dramatic device: the Jewish athlete mentioned in the papyrus from Egypt is identified with the circumcised phallus, and the Sabbath clothes or the man with the shaven head in Caesarea served the same purpose. At times animals were included in the mime, like the camel in Caesarea who appeared onstage covered in garments in the second act. The introduction of animals in the mime livened up the performance and provided a satirical dimension.³⁶

Some rabbis who dealt with the immorality of Roman spectacles held in the region listed a stock of theatrical figures, some of whom participated in the mime. "He who goes to the *stadia* and circuses and watches the sorcerers and enchanter, *bukion*, *mokion*, *molion*, *sagilarion*, *sigillaria*—it is prohibited because one should not sit in the seat of scoffers, as it is said 'In the seat of scoffers you shall not sit.' (Ps. 1:1–2)."³⁷ This list is repeated in talmudic literature three times, with quite a few variations and several additional names that do not appear in the above source. It contains corrupted loanwords from Greek and Latin whose meaning is uncertain; some refer to actors, buffoons, and clowns who took part in the performances in Roman Palestine, as the rabbis attest.³⁸ Two of the characters are known from the *Atellanae*, farcical plays originating in

Atella, Campania, which appeared on the Roman stage in the West, at least until the second century CE.³⁹ Some of the themes and characters dramatized in the *Atellanae* were subsumed into the mime, which was popular in the Greek-speaking East and eventually reached the realm of the rabbis.

In the *Atellanae*, four stock characters appeared onstage, either together or separately—Bucco, Maccus, Dossenus, and Pappus. *Bukion*, who heads our list, is in all probability Bucco, who played the simpleton in the *Atellanae*; he loves to eat, has a big mouth and puffy cheeks, and speaks foolishly. *Mokion*, the second character on our list, is in all probability to be identified with Maccus, the head-shaven actor who also played the fool, even more so than Bucco. Both these characters, appearing together on the Roman stage, were incorporated in the mime, and it is thus clear why the rabbis enumerate them on their list. The other two characters in the *Atellanae* played similar roles. Dossenus, a foolish braggart, played the role of the parasite who eats at the expense of the public. Pappus appeared as an old, not too bright, farmer who takes advice from young consorts who mock him.⁴⁰

After *bukion* and *mokion* on our list we find *molion*, or *milarin*, who is usually identified with the fool (*mōros*) mentioned earlier who accompanied the leading actor in the mime. In the list appearing in the Babylonian Talmud we find *billarin* and *billarion*; Lieberman suggests identifying them with *blaros*, another type of foolish clown mentioned, for example, in an inscription from Dura Europos.⁴¹ They are also possibly mentioned in Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1050 from the second or third century CE, which contains an account of the expenditures for public games. The *bellareinoi* are mentioned there together with several athletes, but, more importantly, with the theater guard, piper, actor, and Homeric reciter—all familiar characters in the Roman theater.⁴² Hunt finds difficulty in interpreting the word and leaves it open, but it seems, in light of its etymological similarity to *billarin* and *billarion*, two loanwords that left their imprint in the Babylonian Talmud, that this enigmatic term refers to actors portraying yet another dimension of the fool, one of the key characters in the Roman mime.

As a political satire, the mime at times criticized the emperor in Rome or political leaders in the provinces.⁴³ Moreover, the emperor himself often protested what was said about him during a play. The social-political satire had an important role in Roman society, as it was intended to alleviate somewhat the tension between the citizens and the ruling power, and served as a diversion from life's daily hardships. One midrash telling of an event in third-century CE Tiberias informs us that the mime in Palestine dealt with similar issues; this is also attested by Choricus, who remarks about the mime's freedom of speech and the constructive effect of his jokes in taunting political leaders.⁴⁴ Yose of Ma'on delivered a scathing sermon in the synagogue of his hometown, which he directed at R. Judah II. Upon hearing about it, the Patriarch became very angry, and Resh Laqish, who came to placate him and ask him to forgive Yose of Ma'on for his critical words, used the following reasoning: "We ought to be grateful to the nations of the world who bring the mimes into their theaters and circuses and are entertained by them, so that they would not have to sit and converse with one another. Yet Yose of Ma'on spoke words of Torah and you became angry with him!"⁴⁵ By praising the mime, Resh Laqish emphasizes the positive aspects of this vehicle for voicing one's discontent with social ills of the rulers. Criticism is a good thing, Resh Laqish claims, even when it serves to challenge the ruler. It must be acknowledged and, when necessary, implemented. Familiar with the nature of the mime and the sociopolitical satire, Resh Laqish solicits the Patriarch, asking him to behave as the nations of the world would and forgive Yose of Ma'on, despite the criticism he aired in his sermon.

The Pantomime

Another type of theatrical performance, the pantomime, featured a single actor wearing an ankle-length tunic with long sleeves, a stole or bandolier (*pallium*), and a mask with a closed mouth, who played multiple roles.⁴⁶ These performances were composed mainly of dance without words, accompanied by a chorus and a variety of musical instruments—

flutes, pipes, cymbals, lyres, castanets, and organs. The *pantomimos*, or *orchēstēs* (pl. *orchēstai*), as the dancer was called according to Greek terminology in the Roman period, required agility, flexibility, and skill in order to perform with precision. Through his body movements, especially the hands and fingers, and wearing a light and close-fitting mask that he changed as needed during the performance, the dancer portrayed the characters participating in the plot. His ability and skill were, of course, crucial to the success of his performance, but the audience, too, had to have a minimal familiarity with the story in order to understand the show.

Mythology was the main theme that characterized pantomime and could have a serious-tragic or comic character. The stories enacted included Leda and the swan, the adultery of Ares and Aphrodite, the madness of Hercules, Oedipus, and so on. Both types of pantomime were brought to Rome from the East during the reign of Augustus. Over time, there was a clear preference for tragic pantomime, while the comic one seems to have waned. In the second half of the second century CE, pantomime was integrated into the thymelic competitions conducted in the great agonistic festival.⁴⁷ Since the complex character of the performance required a certain familiarity with the story, this genre seems to have been appreciated more by the cultural elite of Roman society and did not gain the same popularity as the mime, which with its light nature was favored by the masses.⁴⁸ Pantomime was also performed on the late antique stage, where the dances, as Jacob of Serugh writes, brought great enjoyment to many. Several Christian bishops, like Jacob of Serugh, furnish important information about the pantomime in this later period, including the nature of the dance, the costumes, the themes of the performances, the chorus, the musical instruments, and the audience's behavior.⁴⁹

Several inscriptions, objects, and literary sources indicate the staging of pantomimes in the theaters throughout the region. The long inscription affixed to the pedestal of a statue in honor of Titus Flavius Gerrenus in the southern theater of Gerasa, mentioned earlier, makes reference to pantomime performances that were held there alongside the mime.⁵⁰

M. Aurelius Pylades, son of Juda, who became a celebrated *pantomimus* in Ostia during the reigns of the emperors Valerian and Gallianus, presumably began his career in his hometown of Scythopolis, a fact that also alludes to the holding of such performances in the city.⁵¹ A list found in Magnesia, Asia Minor, that belonged to an anonymous pantomime records a contest in which he participated and won in the theater in Caesarea Maritima, sometime between 176 and 180 CE.⁵² In the fourth century CE, Caesarea Maritima was praised for its pantomime,⁵³ and such performances were presumably held in the city during the visit of the emperor Maximinus.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the names of three performers, each playing a different role in late antique pantomime, are incised on marble slabs in Hall E at Ḥammat Gader: Nicasius the pantomime (*orchēstēs*); Euphemia the actress (*thymelikē*), who may have been a member of the chorus; and Tigranes the piper, whose music purportedly accompanied the dancing, as was customary in pantomime (Figure 3.2).⁵⁵

Several of the mythological mosaics portraying mime, as mentioned earlier, may also reflect pantomime acts performed on the local stage. In addition, terra-cotta theater masks with sealed mouths found in the region underscore the popularity of pantomime in ancient Palestine: two masks, one of a male and the other of a female, were found in a burial tomb at Khirbet Castra; several others were discovered in a potter's workshop in Gerasa; and a closed-mouth marble mask of a young female, once held in the right hand of a statue, was found in the theater in Caesarea Maritima.⁵⁶

Other sources provide additional details about the nature of the pantomime, the role of the dancer in this art form, and prevalent themes enacted in the region. A curse tablet found in Fiq (ancient Apheca), a small village in the vicinity of Hippos (Sussita), was probably directed by a dancer of a rival troupe against one Hyperchios, a bewigged pantomime (*orchēstēs*) of the Blues who was determined to ensure that the latter did not win the contest.⁵⁷ The curse describes the movements of the dancer and the use of his limbs—the neck, hands, feet, sinews, and ankles—to express and communicate each role and character portrayed in the show. It also refers to the contribution of the chorus and its leader,

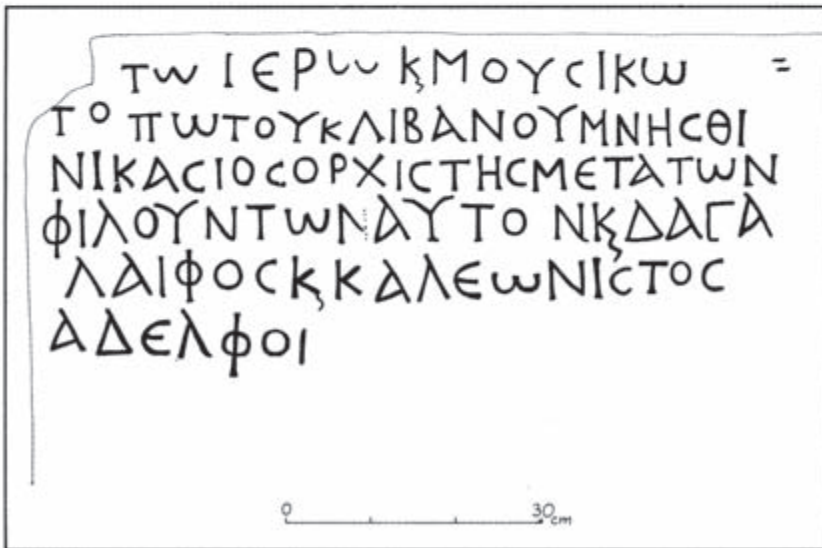
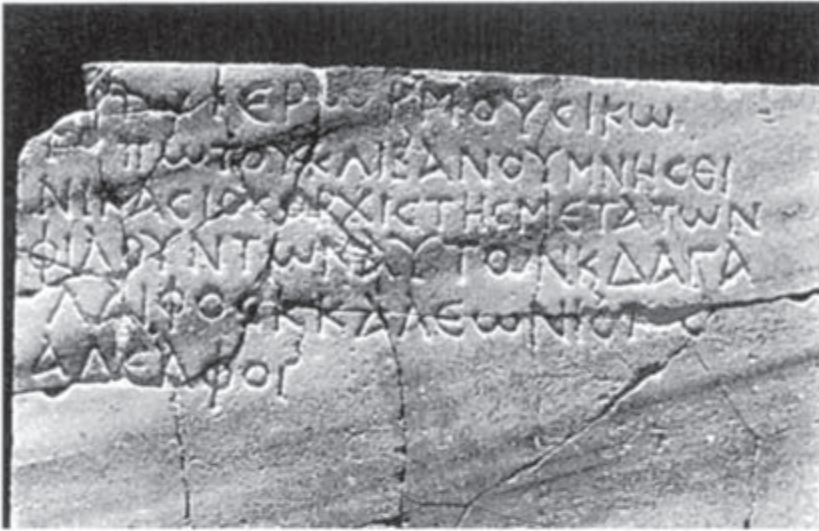


FIGURE 3.2 Dedicatory inscription of Nicasius the pantomime, from the Roman baths at Ḥammat Gader (courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society, following Leah Di Segni, “The Greek Inscriptions of Ḥammat Gader,” in Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Roman Baths of Hammat Gader* [Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1997], 193, no. 9).

as well as the applause of the spectators, which in itself is not only important but also encouraged the performer onstage. Jerome describes the dancer's ability to shift roles, presumably with the aid of changing masks: "as on the theatrical stage one and the same actor now figures as a brawny Hercules, and now relaxes into the softness of a Venus or the quivering tone of a Cybele."⁵⁸ Choricus also refers to dance as well as musical and choral performances, regarding them as tasteless and vulgar.⁵⁹ Elsewhere he alludes in some detail to the pantomime or mime who played several characters in the theater:

Surely you have seen choruses in Dionysus' [precinct]. I imagine that, in that context, you have observed, on some occasion, a dancer charming the stage with male roles as he dances the part of the Thessalian [Achilles], or of the Amazon's boy [Hippolytus], or of some other man. On some other occasions, I am sure, you have seen a dancer's excellent representation of the covered daughter of Briseus [i.e., Briseis] and of Phaedra in love. The dancer tries to persuade the audience, not that he is representing something, but that he actually *is* what he is representing.⁶⁰

Talmudic literature, while providing additional information about the pantomime in the region, attests to the exposure of Jewish society to this type of performance. R. Abba bar Kahana's use of the term *orchēstēs* as a metaphor to explain Michal's remarks to King David in 2 Samuel 6:20 demonstrates a certain familiarity with pantomime. Wishing to emphasize Michal's profound contempt for the king, who danced in front the Ark of the Covenant before all the children of Israel, R. Abba bar Kahana compared him to the *orchēstēs* who entertained the spectators in the Roman theater. The analogy between David's act and the pantomime's performance is precise, but only someone who has witnessed it and has a familiarity with the nature and structure of this type of show could make the connection between the two and, subsequently, understand the significance of his sermon. The analogy pertains not only to the actual dance, the garb of the king, the accompanying music, and the audience, but also alludes to the inferior status of the theater

actor, the *orchēstēs*, in Roman society. Instead of conducting yourself as befits a king, Michal said to David, you danced and behaved like an *orchēstēs*, “one of those detestable people from the inferior social circles.”⁶¹

Pantomime dancing was technically and physically demanding, and, as Ruth Webb has argued, the dancer had to be aware of rhythm, posture, gesture, and tempo in addition to the story and the character he was playing at the moment.⁶² The dancer not only embodied the character in a story, but was also measured by his ability to adapt to the rhythm and pace of music through the control of his physical movements. The Roman audience was often demonstratively vocal when viewing the performance of the *orchēstēs* or when commenting on his ability to portray the character, either cheering him on or recognizing his faults.⁶³ In the fourth century, R. Berakhiah’s sermon expounding Proverbs 25:20 articulates the demands of pantomime dancing to coordinate pace and sound: “Whatever tune the singer may sing, it does not enter the ear of the dancer.”⁶⁴ R. Berakhiah differentiates between singing and dancing, the two skills comprised by the pantomime, saying that if the dancer is absorbed in his dance and ignores the melody or does not understand the chorus’s singer accompanying him, then he will not succeed in his role.

Another passage in the Jerusalem Talmud refers to a Jewish pantomime who performed in the theater in Caesarea. His real name is unknown to us, but he was referred to as “Pantokakos” (Greek, “completely evil”) owing to his malicious deeds. Having met R. Abbahu in Caesarea, he described to him his work as a leading pantomime. Among his roles at the theater, Pantokakos mentioned that he committed five sins: “[he] adorns the theater, engages the *hetaerae* (musicians and dancers), brings their clothes to the bathhouse, claps hands and dances before them, and clashes the *babulia* (cymbals) before them.”⁶⁵ This instructive story, which will be discussed again in Chapter 5, describes a man thought of as coming from the dregs of Jewish society in Caesarea who held down several jobs in the local theater. Pantokakos performed two types of dances: in one he danced while clapping hands, possibly

alluding to the important contribution of hand movement to pantomime performances; in the other he danced while clashing *babulia*, although his exact role here is not clearly defined. When did Pantokakos perform, before whom, and at what point did he clash the cymbals? Was this during his performance in front of an audience, before the dancers and during rehearsals? Or perhaps he was a member of the chorus (*sumphōnia*) that accompanied the pantomime? Each of his roles conforms well to the nature of the pantomime, as it featured dance without words accompanied by a chorus and music. This included the use of percussion instruments—the *tympanum*, *crotalum*, or *cymbalum*—for which there is a parallel text in a 206 CE Egyptian papyrus that refers to Isidora, a dancer living in the metropolis of Arsinoe who specialized in dancing with castanets (*krotalistria*).⁶⁶ However, based on the story conveyed in the rabbinic text, it is difficult to determine the content of Pantokakos's show—was it a dance accompanied by the rhythm of a percussion instrument, or was it a wider musical adaptation of a pantomime?

Among his responsibilities as a leading pantomime, Pantokakos was to engage actors for the theater and train them to perform. He told R. Abbahu that a Jewish lady looking for work in the theater lurked behind the columns of the *scaena frons* while he was busy decorating the theater, and asked him to hire her so she could earn enough money to release her husband from prison. According to the literary evidence, women participated in mime and pantomime performances, at times for a miserable salary. Unmasked women performed scandalous mime routines, often with elements of striptease, and were considered whores.⁶⁷ Thus, wishing to spare her from the theater's sinful ways, Pantokakos sold his bed and gave her the money he received for it so that she could release her husband from prison and avoid tainting her reputation. Even if the story of this Jewish lady is bereft of any historical reality, its author seems to have had some knowledge of the hiring and training processes in Caesarea's theater and of the active role women played in the performances.

Our sources confirm that pantomime emerged on the theater stage in ancient Palestine in the early second century CE, and Choricus's testi-

mony corroborates that they lasted at least until the first half of the sixth century CE. Very little is known about the nature of the pantomime and the themes of the performances in the region, but from what we have described above, this genre maintained a consistent format throughout the empire.

Other Performances in the Theater

The theater of ancient Palestine staged other types of performances besides the mime and pantomime, although our information about these genres is sparse, fragmentary, and poorly attested in the literature. Other than the mention of an event in some epigraphical and historical source, there is no way of knowing if similar shows were held in other cities, at what frequency, and if they continued throughout the period.

The classical comedies and tragedies were translated into Latin already by the third century BCE and were staged in many theaters throughout Italy. Nevertheless, over the years they lost their appeal in the Roman theater and were replaced by other types of shows. Themes associated with comedy, but mainly tragedy, were conveyed through pantomime; however, these classical performances did not vanish entirely from the Roman stage. Several inscriptions describe *tragôidoi* or *kômôidoi* (i.e., actors of tragedy or comedy) who presumably played roles in traditional drama performances on the stages of several Mediterranean cities in the second and early third centuries CE.⁶⁸ Pat Easterling and Richard Miles claim that tragedy, as a theatrical medium, was still important in late antiquity for both the Christian and pagan elites “because of its strong associations with performance and civic identity.”⁶⁹ Reliefs and mosaics portraying themes connected with comedy and tragedy suggest that such performances were held on the Roman stage, and according to some scholars lasted even beyond the fourth century CE.⁷⁰

Comedies and tragedies held on occasion in the theaters of ancient Palestine seem to have been popular, especially among the local educated elite. Philo speaks of Apelles, a tragic actor (*tragôidos*) from Ascalon who then lived in Rome but whose familiarity with the theater and

its tragedies originated in his hometown.⁷¹ Kointos Kaikillios, a comic actor of leading roles from Antioch-by-Daphne, performed in the Roman theater of Caesarea Maritima.⁷² Following a vow he made, most probably in conjunction with a contest, this actor made a dedication to an unknown deity in the city. Choricus tells us that tragedies and musical performances were featured between the chariot races in Gaza in the sixth century CE; however, he writes, these did not satisfy the audience, which was partial to mime.⁷³ He explains elsewhere that if the spectators could not identify the main character in the dance, tragedy, or comedy, the accompanying figures would help in recognizing them: “The presence of an old women, the nurse of Phaedra, and a young man [Hippolytus], handsome and very vigorous, self control and modest,” helped, for example, in recognizing Phaedra, whereas “a tragic actor is identified as Electra by having Orestes and Pylades with her, and a comic actor playing Plangon is identified by the presence of Myrrhine and Daos.”⁷⁴ Choricus also uses Menander’s plays as the model of a harmless drama in comparison to mime. Such plays may have been performed on the stage in sixth-century Gaza, though it is equally possible that his comment attests only to the availability and continued circulation of play scripts under Christian rule as well.⁷⁵

Another, more tangible, expression of familiarity with comedy and tragedy and the cultural impact they had on ancient Palestine’s local population is evident from a small quantity of objects and artistic depictions. These include mostly masks of tragedy or comedy on a relief, a mosaic, or a variety of small objects—terra-cotta statuettes, pendants, oil lamps, and ivory inlays.⁷⁶ Life-size or miniature comic and tragic masks, as well as figurines of stage performers, were discovered in a potter’s workshop in Gerasa in the Decapolis, and isolated fragments of several masks were found in Sussita (Hippos), Aelia Capitolina (Jerusalem), and in several tombs elsewhere in the country (Figure 3.3).⁷⁷ These masks were used as decorations in theaters and houses, as well as in religious and funerary contexts. In Jaffa, a stone door for sealing a tomb bore a relief of a man holding and ostensibly looking at a mask of tragedy (Figure 3.4).⁷⁸ A frieze with two juxtaposed masks was found near Quneitra in the Golan



FIGURE 3.3 Life-size comic mask from the workshop in Gerasa (photo by Zeev Weiss).

Heights, whereas in Arabia, a comedy mask graced a capital in the theater of Sabra, and several masks of both comedy and tragedy carved in local stone on some monuments in Petra exhibit firsthand knowledge of the theater.⁷⁹ Tragic and comic masks executed in greater detail are also depicted in mosaics from Caesarea and Sepphoris.⁸⁰ Moreover, several mythological themes are portrayed in some late antique mosaics from the region. As noted, the figures were apparently influenced by the mimes and pantomimes in the theaters; however, the themes were associated first and foremost with comedy and tragedy and may suggest that such performances were occasionally held on the local stage.



FIGURE 3.4 Jaffa, stone door of a tomb featuring a figure holding a mask of tragedy and looking at it (collection of Israel Antiquities Authority Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; photo by Gabi Laron).

Aquatic displays were popular in a number of cities of the Eastern empire. Such shows featuring dance or mime in conjunction with a body of water were exhibited, for example, in the Graeco-Syrian Maiuma water festival.⁸¹ John Chrysostom's homily recounting a seemingly shameful spectacle of naked mimes swimming in the theater apparently alludes to the Maiuma.⁸² The Syriac chronicler Joshua the Stylite describes a festival with nocturnal activities held in the middle of May in Edessa in the time of Anastasius, referring most probably to the Maiuma celebrations that took place in the city in 495/496 and 497/498 CE. The rejoicing crowds, clad in linen and wearing turbans, gathered in the evening in the theater, where lamps were lit and incense was burned through the night.⁸³

Certain architectural modifications made in the orchestras of Caesarea and Neapolis in the late fourth or fifth century CE, or the construction of a pool behind the theater in Shuni-Maiumas, may suggest that aquatic performances were occasionally held in conjunction with the local theater in ancient Palestine, too.⁸⁴ The Maiuma was at times conducted outside the theater and consequently was associated with a water source. At Birketein, north of Gerasa, an inscription dated to 535 CE records the celebration of the Maiuma there for several successive years either in the theater or, what seems more likely, the nearby pool (Figure 6.6).⁸⁵ At Aphrodisias in Caria, Asia Minor, too, the Maiuma presumably took place in an open pool located in the southern agora. The long pool with its outer edge treated like theater seats was constructed in the late first or early second century CE and remolded some time in late antiquity when a catch-basin was constructed in front of it. According to one inscription found there, Dulcitius, the governor of Caria in the mid or late fifth century CE, presided over a Maiuma (*Maioumarch*) and contributed funds toward its celebrations.⁸⁶ The Maiuma festival finds expression in several Jewish literary sources, demonstrating, for instance, that the festival took place near a water source or indicating the perverse nature of the activities held during religious celebrations.⁸⁷ The original purpose of the Maiuma is unknown, but the scanty evidence may suggest that the

lascivious aquatic displays during the festival gained some popularity in late antiquity in a number of cities of ancient Palestine.

In addition to the theater performances in ancient Palestine, musical contests or shows were conducted primarily in small buildings called *odea*. Herod held two types of contests in Jerusalem and Caesarea, one for musicians and another for *thymelikoi*, artists performing dramatic plays.⁸⁸ These were also held in the early third century CE in Damascus as well as Caesarea Maritima, where Melito from Aphrodisias had emerged victorious. Melito, a kithara player who performed without singing (“pythic” *kitharistês*), was sometimes accompanied by a choir (“cyclic” *kitharistês*); however, the inscription does not specify the nature of the musical contests held in both places.⁸⁹ Eusebius tells of several competitions held a century later, during Maximinus’s visit to Caesarea, including those involving the recitation of speeches and listening to “new and strange songs and music.”⁹⁰ Tigranes the piper, who supposedly accompanied the dancing pantomime, as mentioned above, played his instrument in some other musical performances, at Ḥammāt Gader and elsewhere.⁹¹ As mentioned, these and other kinds of performances were held in Gaza. To this we should add the artistic depictions that uniquely decorate the ends of the *analëmmata*—the lateral supporting walls of the *cavea* in the north theater of Gerasa (Figure 3.5). Apollo holding a kithara in his hand and a satyr playing the *aulos* are discernible in one corner, while a maenad holding a *thyrsos* and *tympanon*, and another playing the *aulos*, appear in the other.⁹² The unique decorations lent the place a special atmosphere, which reflected the Graeco-Roman artistic tradition appropriate for the musical performances in an *odeon*.

B. Athletic Contests and Chariot Races

Agonistic contests—combat sports, races over distance, and other competitions following the Hellenic program—and on occasion also horse and chariot races were fundamental components in the games organized by the cities of ancient Palestine. Horse races, and particularly chariot races, were often conducted outside the structures of civic athleticism,



FIGURE 3.5 Depiction of a maenad playing an *aulos*, from the northern theater in Gerasa (photo by Zeev Weiss).

in the multipurpose local hippodrome. Herod the Great instituted quinquennial games in Jerusalem and Caesarea in honor of Augustus; however, most of the evidence for the competitions in our region pertains to the second through fourth centuries CE.

Athletic contests and chariot races were held in several cities throughout the region: distance-running events as well as combat sports and chariot races were held in Gerasa; chariot races and combat sports in Caesarea; and running and combat sports in Philippi (Panaeas), Scythopolis, and Ascalon. Cities such as Gadara or Tiberias, which had a hippodrome or stadium within their boundaries, presumably conducted similar competitions, although no inscription or other literary source found to date attests to any such events in them. It is also possible that other cities having a Graeco-Roman orientation, such as Ptolemais, Eleutheropolis, and even Sepphoris, held competitions, although there is no evidence to support this assumption either. Athletic contests and chariot races are mentioned in a sermon that R. Efes, a resident of Sepphoris, delivered in Antioch during his visit to the city, which further corroborates the existence of such events in our region.⁹³

The cities of the Roman East publicly announced their religious festivals and loyalty to the imperial dynasty through their coins and civic monuments. Statues were erected in these cities to honor the success of their local athletes, while portrayals of various games were embedded in other art forms.⁹⁴ Statues of athletes decorated theaters, gymnasia, bathhouses, and other public buildings; they are rare in ancient Palestine compared to other places in the Roman world, and only isolated examples provide a glimpse into the lives of the athletes and charioteers, telling about the contests and cultural impact the games had on the region. Several crude figures of boxers and wrestlers, some holding weapons, were scored on the stadium's wall in Samaria, presumably depicting scenes of some of the spectacles held in the building.⁹⁵ According to one inscription, a bronze statue was erected in Scythopolis in the mid-third century CE in honor of Aeschylus, a famous local wrestler. A stone statuette of an unknown athlete found out of context in Samaria further illustrates this phenomenon.⁹⁶ The athletes' families

would commemorate the achievements of their deceased on a tombstone, either in an epitaph or a figural depiction of him holding his prizes. One such marble funerary relief is known from Caesarea, where an athlete, probably a combatant, is depicted standing near a krater and holding a palm branch as a sign of victory in one hand and a round object, probably a coin symbolizing the prize money he received in the *agônes thematikoi*, in his other, raised, hand (Figure 3.6).⁹⁷ Some small objects in daily and private use—gems and oil lamps—portray athletes and charioteers, further illustrating the popularity of athletic contests and chariot races in the region.⁹⁸

The number of sources referring to competitions in ancient Palestine is limited compared to their rich variety in other Graeco-Roman cities. However, this does not mean that chariot races or athletic competitions were held less frequently in ancient Palestine or that they were not appealing to the cultural tastes of the local population. The efforts made by several ancient Palestinian cities to construct a massive hippodrome and establish periodical games and even host athletes from other cities in the empire certainly imply the opposite. The competitive nature of the Hellenic games attracted the local population, motivating the cities to initiate such events. Yet the games in most cities were intended primarily for the indigenous population and were less known and of a lesser stature than those of the well-established festivals in other cities of the Roman East, thus rendering them less likely to draw athletes from abroad on a regular basis. Conversely, the lack of epigraphical evidence for the participation and achievements of athletes from Palestine in games abroad indirectly indicates the inferior status they were accorded and the need to conduct local competitions in their homeland.

None of the sources provides a detailed program of the games held in the cities of Roman Palestine, and in most cases the list of competitions is very fragmentary. Despite the paucity of known epigraphical and literary sources or artistic representations from our region, there is enough evidence to indicate that these competitions featured similar events and followed the same patterns as those prevailing in other cities of the Roman East. By examining this evidence in its wider context, it is possible



FIGURE 3.6 Caesarea, marble funerary relief depicting an athlete holding a palm branch as a sign of victory in one hand and a round object, probably a coin symbolizing his prize money, in the other. The tombstone was found east of the eastern hippodrome (courtesy of Rivka Gersht).

to gain important insight into the nature of the athletic contests and chariot races held in the cities of ancient Palestine.

Combat Sports

Combat sports—wrestling, boxing, and *pankration* (a combination of the two)—are attested in ancient Palestine. These competitions originated in the classical period and were especially popular in the Roman era. The pairs of contenders in each competition were determined by drawing lots. Whoever won the first round went on to the next, until a final winner was declared, as is customary in modern-day contests of this sort. The curved end of the hippodrome (*sphendone*) was well suited for viewing the various combat sports, but they just as well could have been conducted in the theater, which was adjusted at times to accommodate such performances.⁹⁹ Wrestling and *pankration*, in either place, were held on a sandy surface (*skamma*) prepared especially for these events.¹⁰⁰

The training of athletes in the Roman period took place in the municipal bathhouse equipped with athletic facilities or in the local gymnasium, though the latter has yet to be discovered in the region. Exercises in these places were conducted on the *skamma* and at times in a mud pit, which improved the athlete's skill in holding his opponent's slippery body. Oil was a crucial component in maintaining the athlete's hygiene, especially for wrestlers and pankratiasts, as it prevented dirt and sand from clogging the pores of their skin and also reduced skin abrasion during combat.

One tannaitic source mentions a number of activities that were permitted or forbidden on the Sabbath, including some exercises in the wrestling arena: "They may oil and massage their stomach, but not exercise [the body] or be scraped. They may not go down to the Kordima and may not use artificial emetics."¹⁰¹ The sequence of activities in our source follows the order in the training of athletes: oiling the body in preparation for training, exercises, and then, after the sport itself, scraping off the oil and dirt with a strigil—a curved bronze implement.

According to Saul Lieberman, the various manuscripts containing this excerpt preserve two versions of the word *Kordima*—*peloma* and *keroma*—both referring to the place where wrestlers and pankratiasts practiced in the mud. The Mishnah reveals that such routines were known in ancient Palestine as well, suggesting that some Jews may have participated regularly in athletic training in the municipal bathhouse and in competitions in the local hippodrome.

Wrestling was less violent and far less hazardous than the other combatant sports—boxing or *pankration*. The wrestler was allowed to use any techniques or tactics to defeat his opponent, as long as he abided by the standard rules. Beating or breaking fingers was forbidden, but some fairly brutal practices were at times considered legal. The match continued until one of the athletes was unable or unwilling to contend, but the normal objective was to cause the opponent to fall by throwing him either on his back or shoulders. A wrestler won the competition by scoring three falls against his opponent.¹⁰²

The evidence for wrestling comes from three cities in the region. Wrestling matches were held in Gerasa at the beginning of the third century CE; Aeschylus of Scythopolis won competitions in various locales in the mid-third century CE; Ascalon was known for its fine wrestlers in the fourth century CE.¹⁰³

One inscription from Thera opens with an adage in praise of the victory of a successful boxer: “A boxer’s victory is gained in blood.”¹⁰⁴ The Greeks considered boxing a harsh and brutal sport, while the Romans found it to be an exciting test of one’s strength and stamina. The contest continued without a break until victory was declared by one of the opponents, who either acknowledged defeat by holding up his finger or was knocked out. The rules of ancient boxing are not entirely clear, but here, as in wrestling, there were several restricted or forbidden movements, such as clinching.¹⁰⁵

The boxer wore special gloves whose shape developed over time. The Greek boxers had simple interlacing leather straps on the fists and wrists, whereas the Roman pugilists wore leather gloves strapped on with thongs that had lumps and metal spikes sewn into them (*caestus*) to increase the

brutality of the combat.¹⁰⁶ The gloves covered the arms and at times reached up to the shoulders. Underneath the gloves, the boxer curled his fingers around a cylinder in the palm of his hand and protected them with a hard casting. Roman boxing with the *caestus* was not much different from gladiatorial combat. Blood, broken ribs, and recognizable facial injuries were unavoidable consequences of these matches, which at times ended in fatal injury.

Boxing matches were held in several ancient Palestinian cities. One inscription indicates that Aurelius Septimius Eirenaïos, a successful and renowned boxer from Laodicea in the early third century CE, was victorious in the “World Severan Pythian games” held in Caesarea and won three matches in the *agônes thematikoi* in Ascalon and Scythopolis.¹⁰⁷ Though the inscription does not specify the names of his opponents, he probably competed against local pugilists in each city. In the third century, Aurelius Philadelphos, a boxer from Caesarea Philippi (Panaeas), won competitions held in his hometown and in Didyma.¹⁰⁸ Choricus mentions the boxer’s blows that often led to death. Needless to say, such competitions were uncommon in sixth-century CE Gaza, but the author probably alludes to some earlier combats held in the city in the Roman period.¹⁰⁹

The athletes in the *pankration* used all known wrestling and boxing tactics but did not wear gloves. Here, as in the other forms of combat, the match lasted until one opponent signaled his unwillingness or inability to continue the fight before incurring a fatal injury or death. The *pankration* was a total fight in which almost every move was permissible—boxing, kicking, wrestling throws, and other tactics—except for biting and gouging. The *pankration* was popular during the first centuries CE, and its brutality attracted the Roman audience. Cheering the combatants encouraged the latter to increase the anticipated violence and cruelty.¹¹⁰

Our sources tell us that the *pankration* matches were held in several cities of ancient Palestine. In the mid-second century CE, Aelius Aurelius Menander of Aphrodisias participated in the *pankration* and won, and was awarded monetary prizes in Damascus, Tyre, Caesarea, Neapolis,

Scythopolis, Gaza, Caesarea Philippi (Panaeas), and Philadelphia-in-Arabia.¹¹¹ This pankratiast was a distinguished athlete who traveled immense distances in the course of his career, participating in various festivals and emerging victorious, in Rome as well, where the emperor Antoninus Pius awarded him the crown in the Capitoline games. Aelius Aurelius Menander, like other visiting athletes, competed with local pankratiasts in the cities he visited. In addition to the cities mentioned in his list, *pankration* matches were held in Gerasa at the beginning of the third century CE.¹¹²

The *pammachon*, a new combat sport that had been introduced during the games, gained a certain degree of popularity sometime in the third century CE. It was a kind of a free-style wrestling—fighting by all means—that was gradually included as an official event in the games around 300 CE, spreading all over the eastern Mediterranean.¹¹³ Only literary sources, but no inscriptions, suggest that such combats were held in the region in the fourth century CE. Eusebius compares a martyr to a victorious combatant in the *pammachon*; Gaza was renowned for its superb *pammacharii*; and Jerome mentions *pammacharii* as athletes alongside runners and discus throwers.¹¹⁴

Of all the athletic contests held in Roman Palestine, combat sports are mentioned most extensively in talmudic literature. These sources do not distinguish between the above-mentioned types of combat sports, but they do present a clear picture of a variety of contests held in Roman Palestine. In some cases, they describe gladiatorial combats, spectacles no less brutal than the Roman *pankration* or boxing.¹¹⁵ The fear of death always accompanied the boxers and pankratiasts before entering the arena, but they still expressed their determination to fight. According to the epitaph dedicated to Zeus by one Agathus Daemon, who died in the stadium of Olympia in the late second century CE, the boxer had been known to pray “for either a (victory) wreath or death.”¹¹⁶ Such expressions were known to R. Nehemiah of second-century Palestine: “[He] who places himself in the arena stands either to fail or win.”¹¹⁷ The participation of some members of the urban elite and aristocrats in athletic and combat sports is well attested in the Roman period.¹¹⁸ Familiar with

the reality in the local arena, R. Hama bar Hanina compares Jacob's struggle with the angel in Genesis 32:24 to "an athlete who was wrestling with a royal prince, lifting up his eyes and seeing the king standing near him, he threw himself down before him."¹¹⁹ In this sermon, Jacob is portrayed as an aristocrat wrestling an athlete of the lower class; after the latter became aware of Jacob's lineage and that his forefather was protecting him, he threw himself on the ground and let his opponent win. Resh Laqish recounts that the winner of the games was awarded a garland: "It can be compared to two athletes, one of whom was stronger than the other. The stronger prevailed over the weaker, who placed a garland on his (the stronger one's) head."¹²⁰ In another passage the same rabbi describes the emotions of the defeated contestant and his decision to back out of the match: "Let's take the example of two athletes wrestling one another. One of them, sensing he was about to lose, said: 'Now he will beat me and I will be shamed in front of everybody.' What did he do? He kissed his opponent's hand and appeased the wrath of the great athlete."¹²¹ Resh Laqish's above words reflect the feelings of a combatant at the critical moment before his fall and explain how he saved his honor.

Heavyweight athletes had a variety of training routines, including lifting weights and using punching bags. R. Jacob bar Zavdi of Caesarea, presumably familiar with such practices in his city, explains Psalm 19:2 with the following comment: "A mighty man came to a certain city where the inhabitants did not know his strength. A knowing man said that one could tell his strength by the size of the stone he lifts."¹²² A combatant who came to a city presumably needed to exercise and train before entering the arena. Familiar with the prevailing practice, the knowing man offered to check out the athlete by seeing how he lifts weights. Although R. Jacob bar Zavdi does not specify the training place or the combat itself, he does mention that some of the athletes who participated in contests occasionally came from abroad. The participation of foreign athletes in local games is well attested in the region and was known especially in his hometown, Caesarea, since Herod's day and throughout the Roman period.

Additional Athletic Competitions

Races over distances, usually multiples of the stadium, were a key event in the games held during this period. Other competitions included jumping, and discus and javelin throwing. In the pentathlon, athletes competed in a number of sports: a one-stadium race, jumping, discus throwing, javelin throwing, and wrestling. Winning three events granted an athlete victory.¹²³ Such athletic contests were also held in Roman Palestine and Arabia, although we have only scanty evidence of their existence.

The third-century boxer mentioned earlier, Aurelius Septimius Eirenaïos from Laodicaea, won the *dromos* (a footrace of one stade) three times in Ascalon and Scythopolis;¹²⁴ one Alexandrian athlete won the *diaulos* and *hoplite* races held in Gerasa at the beginning of the third century CE;¹²⁵ in the same period, an athlete from Caesarea Philippi (Panaeas) won the *dromos* and *hoplite* races on Rhodes, indicating that contests of this kind were perhaps also held in his hometown;¹²⁶ an athlete from Tralles in Asia Minor who specialized in long-distance races won the *dolichos* in Damascus in the second century CE;¹²⁷ another inscription found in Gerasa appears to be the sole evidence for holding a pentathlon in our region.¹²⁸

Only one description pertaining to jumping, a competition held in the arena, is embedded in an anonymous Genizah fragment of Genesis Rabbah. In response to the question of why the angel of God gave his promise to Abraham after the *Aqedah*, the midrash explains that it came in response to Abraham's request: "Swear to me not to try me again, nor my son Isaac," and the Genizah fragment adds: "after he jumps in the *agôn* and made his son jump in the *agôn*."¹²⁹ Saul Lieberman, who examined the difficulty of this midrash, proved that the word שׁוּר in the text means "jump" and that the entire description revolves around "a jump in the *agôn*," the place where such competitions and games were held.¹³⁰ The distance jump, one of the events of the pentathlon and a contest in its own right, was well known in antiquity and, as already noted, took place in Roman Palestine.

Chariot Races

Horse races, and particularly chariot races, were popular in antiquity and were first held in Palestine in Herod's day. In the ensuing centuries they were financed by private patrons and followed the tradition prevailing in the Roman East, whereby participation in the races was not restricted to certain groups, and the number of contestants in each varied. Only in the fifth century were factions introduced in Roman Palestine, greatly changing the character and organization of competitions in the region.¹³¹ Rivalries between the circus factions and the enthusiasm of their followers left their mark in inscriptions throughout the empire, several of which exhorted the victory of the Blues, testifying to some extent to the popularity of chariot races in late antique Palestine.¹³²

Most races used the *quadriga* driven by a single charioteer, although at times the *biga* or *triga* was used.¹³³ Ten or twelve chariots participated in a race, depending on the number of stalls in the hippodrome's *carceres*. Several races were held each day; while their number may have varied from place to place, they generally continued until nightfall. The Midrash of King Solomon's Throne and the Hippodrome describes the chariots driving around the central barrier (*euripus*) and indirectly refers to the four factions known in the late antique hippodrome—the Blues, Greens, Reds, and Whites.¹³⁴

The masses gathering in the civic hippodrome eagerly awaited the start of the race, when all turned their heads to the starting gate, anticipating the signal and the simultaneous opening of the *carceres*. The presiding magistrate, who sat in a special box above the *carceres*, signaled the beginning of the race by dropping a white cloth (*mappa*).¹³⁵ Members of the nobility appear in late antique art holding a *mappa*, either in their lowered or raised right hand, to represent imperial authority at the celebration of the games.¹³⁶ A basalt statue found in the hippodrome of Bostra in Arabia portrays a man wearing a *himation*, while a similar image appears in relief on a sarcophagus lid from Scythopolis (Figure 3.7).¹³⁷ These unknown figures, presumably members of the local elite, presided at the games in Bostra and Scythopolis, and the statue or relief



FIGURE 3.7 A broken basalt statue found in the hippodrome of Bosra portrays a man wearing a *himation* and holding a *mappa* in his left hand (courtesy of Institut français du Proche-Orient, following Thomas M. Weber, “La sculpture,” *Bosra aux portes de l’Arabie*, ed. Jacqueline Dentzer-Feydy et al., Guides archéologiques de l’Institut français du Proche-Orient 5 [Beirut: Institut français du Proche-Orient. 2007], 50, fig. 15).

made in their honor was meant to commemorate their civic duty in the games held in their hometowns.

With the opening of the gates, the charioteers charged forward onto the racecourse, encircling the *euripus* seven times. The tension in the hippodrome was great, and the commotion grew as the race progressed. Excitement was high as the spectators witnessed occasional collisions, especially around the turning points (*metae*) at either end of the *euripus*, where the chariots rode close to each other. Every race ended with a formal ceremony after the winning charioteer rode a lap of honor around the arena while the masses applauded and cheered; he then approached the presiding magistrate of the games and received a palm branch, the sign of victory in the games, and a monetary prize.¹³⁸ This moment was commemorated by the fourth-century CE Palestinian *amora* R. Abin, who compared the victory of a charioteer in the hippodrome being awarded a palm branch to the waving of a *lulav* (palm branch) on the Feast of Tabernacles: “What kind of victory is meant by the phrase ‘in thy right hand there are pleasures of victory’ (Ps. 16:11)? That kind in which the victor receives a palm branch. For according to the custom of the world, when two *heniochi* (charioteers) race in the hippodrome, which of them receives the palm branch? The victor.”¹³⁹

Herod held *quadriga* and *biga* chariot races in Jerusalem and Caesarea, as well as those of riders mounted on racehorses; in subsequent centuries, the races presumably followed the same format.¹⁴⁰ One inscription from early third-century CE Gerasa in the Decapolis lists two winning charioteers among the athletes, the façade of a Roman sarcophagus found in Tul Karem portrays a *euripus* with an obelisk and two *metae*, and may have contained the remains of an anonymous charioteer.¹⁴¹ In the fourth century CE, Caesarea boasted its fine charioteers and races.¹⁴² Justas and Julianus, the leaders of the Samaritan rebellions in 484 and 529 CE, respectively, each conducted chariot races, the former in Caesarea and the latter in Neapolis.¹⁴³ Chariot races were held in Gaza, too. One charioteer from that city was struck by a demon while riding in his chariot and was purportedly healed by Hilarion.¹⁴⁴ According to Jerome, the horses of one Italicus, a Christian resident of Gaza, raced in the

fourth century CE against those of the local *duovir*, one of the city's two magistrates.¹⁴⁵ Jerome's description sheds light on the races held in the city—their organization as well as the behavior of the spectators. Later, in the first half of the sixth century, Choricus makes disparaging remarks about chariot races, presumably depicting the reality as he knew it in several ancient Palestinian cities.¹⁴⁶ Between races, the day-long program in these cities was interspersed with other performances, such as mime, pantomime, music, or acrobatics.¹⁴⁷

Several outstanding charioteers, some known by name, became rich and famous in the Roman and late antique eras. However, most of the charioteers—in all probability local citizens but at times riders from abroad—competed in the local arenas of ancient Palestine, the Decapolis, and Arabia. In third-century Gerasa, two triumphant charioteers came to the city from Alexandria.¹⁴⁸ Conversely, one prominent charioteer from Ascalon, who presumably gained his experience in the hippodrome of his hometown, was invited to the imperial capital, where he achieved great fame before his death.¹⁴⁹ Others in our region are mentioned by name, but we have no information about their careers. A small marble plaque found in Caesarea's hippo-stadium bearing the name "Myrismos (the) charioteer" was presumably installed beside his bust or statue somewhere inside the building to commemorate his victory in the race (Figure 3.8). Another charioteer, Domninus, competed in Caesarea's eastern hippodrome and wished to win the race by cursing his unnamed rival (see below).¹⁵⁰

The competitive nature of the chariot races and the desire to win and gain fame and fortune led people to use supernatural methods that would influence the competition, either by protecting a charioteer and his horses or by impeding his opponent's. Silke Trzcionka maintains that several factors in the fourth century CE played a role in the implementation of such practices in Syria and ancient Palestine—the agonistic context of the event, financial interests, and the charioteers' power to manipulate supernatural forces. Thus, curses, supernatural performance-enhancers, and apotropaic devices were applied to reach their goal. The desired effect of *defixiones* (curse tablets) "would have been the success-



FIGURE 3.8 Marble plaque bearing the name “Myrismos (the) charioteer,” found in Caesarea’s hippo-stadium (with permission of Yosef Porath, photo courtesy of Werner Eck).

ful invocation of the supernatural powers and their consequent ability to hinder the opposition.”¹⁵¹ In 389 CE, a special decree forbade the direct or indirect use of supernatural arts by charioteers or their accomplices.¹⁵² The nature of the decree and its explicit details reflect the social behavior prevailing at this time, whereby the people, including charioteers, were involved in using supernatural powers to impede an opponent in order to win the race.

Such stratagems were employed in ancient Palestine as well, either by the charioteer, his supporters, or the parties involved in staging the event. Three sources dealing with this phenomenon are known from our region. Each was composed in a different realm, illuminating certain aspects or expressing the extensive knowledge of its author, but they all attest to one common behavioral practice in various segments of society—the use of magical ploys, *defixiones*, and the invocation of supernatural powers in order to win a race.

In the fourth century, one Italicus, a Christian resident of Gaza, asked Hilarion to bless his horses before a race so they would win in the

hippodrome against his pagan opponent, an adherent of the god Marnas whose magician (*magikon*) strengthened his horses with demonic forces. Hilarion prescribed an earthenware drinking cup for Italicus, from which he was to sprinkle water over his stable and horses, his charioteers and his chariot, and the barriers of the racecourse. Jerome's account of the events in the city describes the high enthusiasm in the local hippodrome, where each side, aided by supernatural powers, was confident of its victory:

The crowd was in a marvelous state of excitement, for the enemy in derision had published the news of what was going to be done, and the backers of Italicus were in high spirits at the victory which they promised themselves. The signal is given; the one team flies towards the goal, the other sticks fast: the wheels are glowing hot beneath the chariot of the one, while the other scarce catches a glimpse of their opponents' backs as they flit past. The shouts of the crowd swell to a roar, and the heathens themselves with one voice declare Marnas is conquered by Christ.¹⁵³

A similar practice is also noted in Jewish society. The author of *Sefer Harazim* (*The Book of the Mysteries*), who lived in Roman Palestine in the third or fourth century CE, suggests an amulet incantation for one desirous of winning in the hippodrome competitions:

If you wish to race horses, (even) when they are exhausted, so they will not stumble in their running, that they will be swift as the wind, and the foot of no living thing will pass them, and they will win popularity in their running, take a silver *lamella* and write upon it the names of the horses and the names of the angels and the name of the prince who is over them and say: I adjure you angels of running, who run amid the stars, that you will grid with strength and courage the horses that N is racing and his *heniochos* (charioteer) who is racing them.¹⁵⁴

The use of *defixiones* containing spells directed at rival charioteers and horses in order to win a horse race is known in texts found in several hip-

podromes throughout the Roman world.¹⁵⁵ One such curse tablet, found buried in a shallow pit 3 meters southwest of the *meta prima* in the eastern hippodrome in Caesarea, contains the curse of the above-mentioned charioteer Domninus, who directed it against his unnamed rival: “I summon you, mighty mistress. . . . Unsettle, blind, and bind the opposing charioteer, so that they not see Domninus the charioteer, and the opposing horses. Bind and blind and abase [them] and do not allow them to run, and may not make the turn and may they not win the circus of Caesarea.”¹⁵⁶ Domninus not only wished to win the contest but asked the demons to hinder his rival’s performance by preventing him from making the turn around the barrier’s turning post. The *meta prima* and *meta secunda* were for charioteers the most vulnerable spots along the track, and whoever placed the curse tablet in those exact locations hoped to achieve the demise of his opponent near that place.

The story about Italicus, the suggested formula in *Sefer Harazim*, and especially the curse tablet from Caesarea not only indicate the involvement of pagans, Jews, and Christians in chariot races held in the hippodromes throughout the region, but also demonstrate that all used similar practices, even magic, to help win races. According to these three sources, apotropaic rituals and magic spells were applied in the hippodrome, supposedly near the *carceres* or *metae*, the two transitional spaces that posed the most technically challenging moments of a race.

C. Amphitheatrical Shows

Particularly popular in the Roman period were gladiatorial combats and animal baiting, in which hirelings, slaves, prisoners of war, and condemned criminals participated.¹⁵⁷ The condemned men fought in the arena as gladiators (*damnati ad ludum*) or were executed by wild beasts (*damnati ad bestias*). The cruel character of the games was part and parcel of the Roman ambience, a warrior nation that placed trust in the power of its rule. The uproar emanating from the amphitheater following the spectacles of killing did not cease in the cities, even in times of peace and secure borders in the first centuries CE. The desire to win and

the frustration of defeat not only characterized the gladiators' aspirations in the arena, but also reflected the mood of the spectators in their everyday lives. This emotional identification led to what Carlin Barton has coined a "gladiatorial madness" in Roman society.¹⁵⁸ Alison Futrell has argued that the amphitheater was not merely a backdrop for the performances, but also served as a "nexus for the Imperial cult, Celtic cult practice, and the cult of Nemesis, each of which provided a meaningful pattern to reconcile the individual and his social or political group within the desired structure."¹⁵⁹ It is Garrett Fagan's contention that the Romans were not alone in responding to the allure of seeing people and animals tormented and killed, and that other populations, even in far-away places, turned out in significant numbers and for the same reasons to witness the brutalities of the arena, and when exposed to its horrors embraced them enthusiastically. In his search for the reasons why different peoples and communities around the Mediterranean were attracted to the arena, Fagan enumerates four major well-documented psychological phenomena that may provide a better explanation for this anomalous sociocultural behavior: the importance of crowd dynamics; the satisfaction of prejudice; their excitement at sports events; and, finally, the allure of violence as entertainment. "The immediate lure of the arena," Fagan argues, "lay in the psychologically generated experiences of excitement, belonging, validation, and agency; enjoyment of prejudices sates (especially during hunts and executions); emotional involvement in competitive sports and appreciation of skill and dexterity in professional performers; and, for at least some of those present, the *frisson* of watching violence meted out to those judged deserving of it."¹⁶⁰

In the Herodian period, gladiatorial combats and animal baiting following the Roman model were held in the multipurpose hippo-stadium, whereas from the early second century onward they took place primarily in the amphitheater, the oval building designated especially for such shows. Josephus describes the large and diverse number of animals that Herod featured in his Jerusalem games in honor of Augustus: "There was also a supply of wild beasts, a great many lions and other animals having been brought together for him, such as were of extraordinary

strength or of very rare kinds.”¹⁶¹ In the Jerusalem arena, animals fought each other or humans condemned to death, and in Caesarea there were gladiatorial combats.¹⁶² Agrippa I organized great gladiatorial games in the amphitheater in Berytus, where many criminals were executed as well.¹⁶³ Titus had many Jewish captives thrown into the arena during the performances held in Caesarea Philippi and in the games in Caesarea in honor of his brother Domitian’s birthday on October 24, 70 CE.¹⁶⁴

The oval amphitheatres constructed in several locales in the course of the Roman period provide evidence for the popularity of amphitheatrical performances, at least among the growing Roman population that had established itself in the region. But it is the literary sources, and mainly the assortment of descriptions embedded in rabbinic literature, that furnish additional information regarding the popularity of spectacles in the wider spectrum of society, as well as the types of shows, the nature of the participants, and even some scenes reflecting these brutal performances in ancient Palestine. As in the Herodian era and during the Great Revolt, criminals and prisoners of war were among those who fought in the arena in the later period as well—as was customary in other parts of the empire. Permission to go to the stadium “because [a Jew] will cry out to save lives” suggests that at the end of the Bar-Kokhba revolt, too, Jewish war captives were executed in the arena.¹⁶⁵ Eusebius tells of the many Christians persecuted during Diocletian’s reign who were executed in the arena in Caesarea, and Ammianus Marcellinus mentions that those condemned of high treason were sent to their death in the arena in Scythopolis.¹⁶⁶

Gladiators were trained in the *ludus*, a special school headed by the *lanista*, who bought combatants, tended to their needs, trained them, and made them available for contests (see Chap. 4). Resh Laqish, himself a gladiator before entering the world of the Jewish academy, mentions that on the eve of a show, the gladiators were given a festive meal (*cena libera*) contributed by the benefactors of the games, and it is here that the combatants made known their final requests.¹⁶⁷ The next day, the events opened with a spectacular procession accompanied by music and a display of the gladiators’ arms. Immediately thereafter, the animal-baiting contest commenced, followed by the gladiatorial games. The

variety of spectacles and their sequence were intended to captivate the audience for the entire show. First to be introduced into the arena, without their weapons, were those condemned to death, who confronted the hungry animals and were devoured by them; the hunting games were featured in the course of the day and were followed by the various gladiatorial combats. The orchestra accompanying the shows adjusted the music to match the mood of the various events.¹⁶⁸ Moments of tension and climax were joined by sounds that blended with the excited crowd's cheering and booing the combatants in the arena.

Gladiatorial Combats

The gladiatorial games (*munera gladiatorum*) involved two armed combatants. For example, the *retiarius*, half naked and bearing a net and trident, fought against the *myrmillo*, who wore a helmet and was armed with a shield and sword. The battle continued until one of them was defeated or killed.¹⁶⁹ The fighting techniques and weapons used by the gladiators in the amphitheaters of ancient Palestine supposedly complied with Roman custom. In rabbinic literature, the gladiator is called *ludarius* or *monomachos*, the latter being the common Greek term in the cities of the Roman East.¹⁷⁰

R. Ḥanina, wishing to explain why Jacob called for his sons on his deathbed to inform them of their legacy, compares him to Esau and says: "It is the practice in the world that a gladiator does not make a will. And who makes a will? Freeman. The evil Esau dies and does not make a will. . . . And who makes a will? Jacob."¹⁷¹ Another version of the midrash is especially interesting not only because of the other term appearing there, but also because it creates an indirect connection between Esau—portraying Rome in rabbinic literature—and the Roman gladiator living by the sword: "And Jacob called for his sons. Why didn't Esau call for his sons? Because a *monomachos* does not make a will, since his father made him a *monomachos*, as it is written, 'And by his sword he shall live.' " The *ludarius* or *monomachos*, unlike the freeman, does not make a will because he never knows when he will meet his death in the arena.¹⁷²

Resh Laqish, one of the most prominent *amoraim* in third-century CE Palestine, uses his experience as a *ludarius* in his scholarly discourse.¹⁷³ In the next century, R. Abbahu redeemed a Jew who sold himself to a gladiator training school (*ludus*), while R. Ami refused to do so.¹⁷⁴ During the persecution of the Christians in the early fourth century CE, Timotheus, Theophilus, and Theotimus, among others, were condemned by the governor Urbanus to suffer the torments of gladiatorial combat.¹⁷⁵ Some of the weapons used by gladiators are mentioned by name in rabbinic literature, though not necessarily in reference to amphitheatrical games: “the shield they play with in the arena is susceptible to corpse uncleanness.”¹⁷⁶

Gladiators in the Roman East sometimes represented themselves as athletes, while some of the technical terms used to describe their activities or victories were taken from the *agones* competitions.¹⁷⁷ The rabbis who were familiar with the Greek terminology at times identified the gladiator, as elsewhere in the Roman East, as an athlete fighting in the arena. Some of the rabbinic sources mentioned earlier with regard to athletes seem to describe the Roman *pankration*, or boxing, but these could equally reflect the no-less-cruel gladiatorial combats. The ambiguous reality emerging from these texts, whether inspired by combat sports or gladiatorial combats, requires careful treatment but leaves room for interpretation.¹⁷⁸ By using the term “athlete,” with its dual meaning, or by merging the athlete and the gladiator into one figure, the rabbis actually infer that gladiators were regarded as athletes in ancient Palestine, as elsewhere, and that gladiatorial combats might have had some affinities with *agones* competitions.

An anonymous sermon, missing from the printed edition but cited by Tanḥuma-Yelammedenu midrashic literature, describes the way in which the gladiatorial combats were opened: “‘On the first day you shall take’ (Lev. 23:40)—first they sound the trumpet and then the athletes come in.”¹⁷⁹ Whoever composed this sermon indeed used the word “athlete” and also painted a very clear and accurate picture of the gladiatorial shows, which opened with a colorful procession accompanied by music.

In another sermon on the verse, “Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground” (Gen. 4:10), R. Simeon bar Yoḥai uses the following parable: “It is difficult to say this thing, and the mouth cannot utter it plainly. Think of two athletes wrestling before the king; had the king wished, he could have separated them. But he did not so desire, and one overcame the other and killed him, and he (the victim) cried out (before he died), ‘Let my cause be pleaded before the king!’ Even so, the voice of your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.”¹⁸⁰ According to the biblical story, Cain and Abel made an offering before God, who accepted the offering of the latter brother. The slighted Cain seized the opportunity and killed his brother Abel. R. Simeon bar Yoḥai describes the story of the brothers as an imaginary contest, in which the two spar over whose offering God would prefer, like wrestlers in the arena, where only one emerges victorious. According to the biblical story, Abel is regarded as the winner, but the sermon underscores a more dramatic version, wherein Cain is the winner and Abel is defeated. Therefore R. Simeon bar Yoḥai declares: “It is difficult to say this, and the mouth cannot interpret it easily.” The sparring brothers appear in R. Simeon bar Yoḥai’s sermon as two combatant athletes; it is probably not the *agones* competitions that inspired him, but rather the very familiar bloody gladiatorial show that took place in the amphitheater. R. Simeon bar Yoḥai tries to explain the brothers’ imaginary struggle and to illustrate the cries of the murdered Abel; he compares him to the defeated gladiator who, with his last breath, tries to save his life. The parable opens with a short description of the event, but the emphasis is on that tense and threatening moment before the struggle’s final outcome is determined, when the defeated opponent lies on the ground and the triumphant gladiator hovers over him, waiting for the sign—the shouts of the mob and the turn of the thumb, either *mitte* (to let him go) or *iugula* (to kill him). The defeated gladiator looks at the emperor, waves his hand to him for compassion and hope, perhaps even begging him to spare his life. In this way, says R. Simeon bar Yoḥai, one should understand Abel, shouting from the ground, seemingly chiding God. “You know,” Abel supposedly said, “you could have prevented my death. Why didn’t you

separate us just as the emperor separates the wrestlers and decides the winner in the arena?” “Your lack of intervention,” Abel allegedly added, “is like the emperor’s decision indicating to the athletes-gladiators to fight until death, and this is how my brother Cain treated me as well.”

Animal Baiting

Aside from the simple exhibition of animals, two kinds of animal-baiting events took place in the amphitheater. Wild animals were either baited and killed by men or preyed upon by other animals (*venationes*).¹⁸¹ The long list of animals participating in such shows in Roman Palestine includes bulls, lions, bears, wolves, and rams. Some animals were caught locally, while the more exotic beasts were brought from foreign lands. Josephus notes that Herod received a cargo of wild beasts, including lions, but he does not mention its origin.¹⁸² Eusebius, on the other hand, specifies that when the emperor Maximinus visited Caesarea, animals were brought to Caesarea from India, Ethiopia, and elsewhere, with the intention of throwing Christians to the wild beasts in the local arena.¹⁸³ Eusebius does not list the types of animals brought to the city, but the arrival of some wild beasts is alluded to on the Caesarea cup, suggesting that they were intended for the *venationes* held there in the fourth century CE.¹⁸⁴

The buildings in which such performances took place were decorated in this spirit. Wall paintings with animals and floral landscapes embellished the podium around the arena in the amphitheaters of Eleutheropoli and Scythopolis, but those appearing on several plaster layers in the hippo-stadium of Caesarea are better preserved (Figure 3.9). One of these layers displays a row of large-size animals—an elephant, rhinoceros, panther, deer, wolf, wild boar—and perhaps even a gladiator, against a background of schematic vegetation.¹⁸⁵ Similar depictions also appeared in the main corridor leading into the arena in Neapolis, though these are not well preserved. The decorations, together with other objects that may have stood in the arena, created a wildlife landscape befitting the nature of the hunting performances held there.

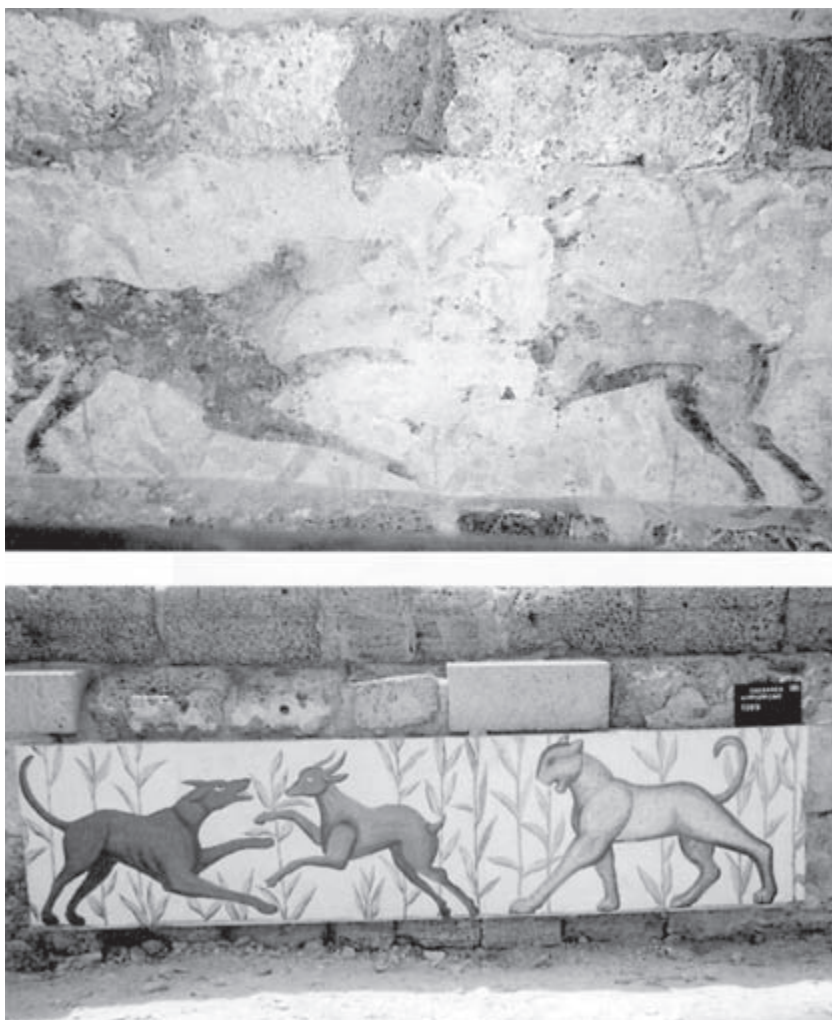


FIGURE 3.9 Wall paintings with animals and a floral landscape embellishing the podium wall in Caesarea's hippo-stadium (courtesy of Yosef Porath).

Kunêgion/kunêgia in rabbinic literature, following the Greek terminology, refers to the hunting of wild beasts in the amphitheater.¹⁸⁶ For instance, R. Yudan bar R. Simeon, a third-century CE *amora*, said: “Beasts and a whale are *kunêgia* of the righteous in the days to come, and whoever has not seen a *kunêgia* of the nations of the world in this

world will merit seeing them in the next.”¹⁸⁷ Elsewhere the nations of the world instruct Israel: “Go and bring us wolves and lions and bring them into our house of contests, and with them we will make *kunya’ot* (fights of wild beasts).”¹⁸⁸ Another rabbi uses similar terminology when describing the dialogue between David and Saul (1 Sam. 17:33–37): “And so you find David, when out fighting Goliath the Philistine, and Saul said to him: ‘You cannot approach the Philistine,’ and David said to him: ‘Your servant (= I) was a shepherd [to his father], and I went out after him and slayed him, as well as the lion and the bear.’ Saul said to him: ‘And who told you that you could kill him?’ David replied to him: ‘And the *kunêgia*, my father taught me, God who saved me from the clutches of the lion will save me from this Philistine.’”¹⁸⁹ The rabbi knowingly chose the term *kunêgia* in his sermon, creating an analogy between the hunter in the arena and David’s act. Saving the flock from the lion and the bear, as written in 1 Samuel 17:36, is compared in the sermon to the hunter in the arena of the amphitheater, and in such a place it is indeed most appropriate to use the term *kunêgia*, a term familiar to the audience listening to the sermon.

The *venationes*, or *theriomachia* (another common phrase in the Greek East) staged in the arena inspired some rabbis in composing their sermons, although these terms are never mentioned explicitly.¹⁹⁰ In the midrash, Joseph’s dispute with Judah, after he blamed Jacob’s sons for stealing his goblet and before he reintroduced himself to his brothers in Egypt (Gen. 40:18), is likened to a struggle between animals in the arena: “To what are they likened? To a bull that has gone out, and all the animals flee from him, and he would kick one and gore the other. And the lion came and did not stand before him; rather, the lion was seen, and the bull was summoned and could not be found.”¹⁹¹ Joseph is likened in the midrash to the bull, the brother to the animals, and Judah to the lion, and according to the description there, “Joseph would overtake them and terrorize them, alienate them, and gore them,” but when Judah (the lion) came and delivered his speech, he attacked Joseph, viceroy to the king (the bull), and Joseph could not withstand him and decided to make himself known to his brothers. The lion and the bull, as well as the

other pairs of animals that fought each other in the arena, are often depicted in mosaics and reliefs in Roman art. It seems that the anonymous rabbi who conceptualized the parable for the sermon was inspired by a reality with which he and his audience were familiar.¹⁹²

As noted above, the dangerous performances held in the arena found wide expression in Roman art—on reliefs, mosaics, and small artifacts.¹⁹³ They portray various aspects of the games and provide valuable information about the nature of the match, fighting techniques, clothing, and types of weaponry. Although the performances in ancient Palestine followed the Roman model and were held from time to time in various locales throughout the region, they found only poor expression in the local art. An incised graffito describing a gladiatorial battle between a *myrmillo* and a *retiarius* was found on the wall of Catacomb 4 in Bet She'arim, the necropolis of a Jewish town in the western Lower Galilee (Figure 5.2). The net covers the *myrmillo* holding his shield, while the *retiarius* stands to his right holding his trident upright, suggesting that he is about to kill his opponent. Similar engravings were found in Judaea, in a Jewish burial tomb on Tel Itun (Figure 3.10). One depiction shows a *myrmillo* holding a sword and rectangular shield. *Retiarii* holding a trident in one hand are depicted in various positions in several other engravings.¹⁹⁴ Gladiator and animal-baiting scenes also appear on a number of oil lamps that were in daily use in the region.¹⁹⁵ Hunting scenes appear frequently in mosaic art in the region, though they do not necessarily relate to events held in the amphitheater. In contrast, two artifacts found *ex situ*, one in Eleutheropolis and the other at a site near Jerusalem, portray hunting scenes in relief, probably meant to inspire the events held in the amphitheater. The early fourth-century CE frieze from Eleutheropolis is decorated with armed *erotes* hunting wild beasts, whereas the fragment of a marble table found near Jerusalem (late fourth–early fifth centuries CE) is embellished with depictions of warriors armed with spears and shields fighting lions.¹⁹⁶

The repertoire of performances, competitions, and shows in ancient Palestine follows the same artistic program prevailing throughout the

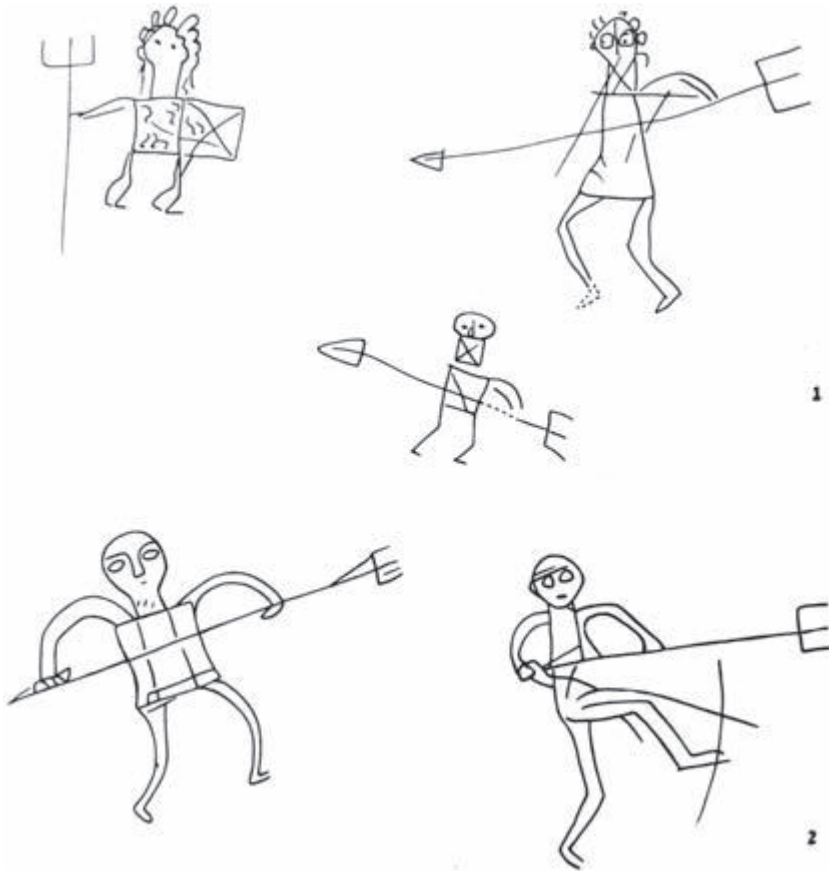


FIGURE 3.10 Engravings of gladiators in a Jewish burial cave at Tel Itun, Judaea (courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority, following Vassilios Tzaferis, “A Monumental Roman Tomb at Tell ‘Eitun,” *Atiqot* 8 [1982]: fig. 2).

Roman Empire. A visitor to the theater, hippodrome, or amphitheater in one of the cities of ancient Palestine, be it a guest coming from nearby or a foreigner from afar, blended in well with the local crowds and could enjoy the performance, competition, or show onstage or in the arena as if he were attending a similar event in his hometown.

With the introduction of these new forms of entertainment in the region during the reign of Herod the Great, the local population adjusted its cultural tastes accordingly, and quite quickly, while the desire to have

more performances throughout the country increased significantly over time. Although this cultural revolution finds hardly any expression in the visual arts, leaving in its wake practically no artistic representations of the actual performances, either in relief or mosaic, these forms of entertainment were apparently very popular in the region. In contrast, the literary sources pertaining to ancient Palestine provide valuable information that sheds light on the nature of the shows conducted in the region. Although the number of references to the various performances and the overall resultant picture do not suggest the popularity or preference for one type of performance over another during the Roman period, the buildings themselves exhibit the cultural change that had occurred over time and point to the degree of popularity of these events in ancient Palestine. Judging by the number of buildings constructed in the cities of ancient Palestine, theatrical performances—primarily mime, pantomime, and some other scenic events—were the most popular. Chariot races and athletic contests in the hippodrome were relatively common in the region, but it seems that local competitions and races sponsored by the cities of ancient Palestine were not famous or important enough to draw athletes and charioteers on tour in the Roman East. Amphitheatrical shows were less common, judging by the number of the buildings known in the region; however, the number of literary sources, found for the most part in Jewish literature, may suggest that these were quite popular, at least in those cities that boasted a monumental amphitheater. Launching a variety of shows in ancient Palestine greatly affected the daily life and behavior of the local population, creating an interesting cultural *mélange* of East and West, albeit disparate in its nature.

The buildings in each locale served as a source of pride for its citizens, who were committed to ensuring the ongoing operation of these institutions and that the various shows conducted in them would attract large, enthusiastic audiences. It seems that the inhabitants of each city were keen to invest significant sums of money in these spectacular events for the sake of aggrandizing their names and their cities. Yet the construction and maintenance costs, the financing of performances, compe-

titions, and spectacles, as well as their organization, all for the benefit of the local citizens, posed a significant burden on the municipal coffers. Chapter 4 will examine these aspects from a broader perspective, aiming to reconstruct the ongoing operation of these entertainment buildings in the cities of ancient Palestine.

4

Financing, Organization, and Operation

BUILDINGS FOR mass entertainment were constructed in the cities of ancient Palestine so that its local inhabitants could enjoy the same performances held throughout the Roman world. It was Herod the Great who initially introduced Roman public spectacles and competitions in ancient Palestine; however, the cultural repercussions were distinctly felt in the entire region—including the cities of the Decapolis and Arabia—only in the second and early third centuries CE, when every city boasted at least one monumental building for such performances.

The organization of competitions, performances, and spectacles, as well as the responsibility for their ongoing operation, required long-term financing and other logistics. This chapter will investigate the behind-the-scene workings of the buildings for mass entertainment in ancient Palestine and the activities held in them: the financial backing for the construction of theaters, hippodromes, and amphitheaters; the maintenance and patronage of the performances held in various locales, who initiated and endorsed the performances, and in what capacity (as games, festivals, special events, etc.); the operative body that undertook the administration and organizational aspects of these events; and how the actors, athletes, charioteers, gladiators, and other performers were

managed and trained. Incorporating these details into the larger picture will greatly elucidate how Graeco-Roman forms of entertainment were organized in ancient Palestine and throughout the entire region, and how their financing affected the economy of their cities.

Financing Construction

Herod the Great initiated and financed the construction of buildings for public entertainment in ancient Palestine, investing large sums of money in the quinquennial games held in his kingdom.¹ His endeavors were not confined to his realm but, according to Flavius Josephus, also extended to the establishment of theaters in Sidon and Damascus, as well as to the revival of the Olympic games that had waned owing to a lack of funds.² Similarly, Agrippa I held theatrical performances in honor of the emperor in Caesarea Maritima; he also built a theater and amphitheater in Berytus and funded the performances there.³ It is very possible that a similar situation prevailed in the neighboring Nabataean kingdom, where the construction of the theater in Petra is attributed to Aretas IV.⁴ Unlike the independent kingdoms, the ruling institutions in each Roman city throughout the empire were responsible for building and financing these structures. Taxes, revenues from municipal properties, *summae honorariae* (i.e., payments made by civic magistrates for the privilege of holding public office), and private donations of the urban aristocracy enabled the construction of public institutions in the Roman city, including buildings for mass entertainment.⁵

Funding the monumental construction in ancient Palestine, as in the cities of the Decapolis and Arabia, was the responsibility of the municipalities and was taken from public monies and private benefactions; for our region as well, these resources were crucial for backing large projects, including the construction of buildings for mass entertainment. In comparison, the emperor's participation in the construction of public buildings in ancient Palestine was meager; he usually granted gifts to temples or aqueducts, but there is no evidence that he assisted cities by erecting buildings for mass entertainment.⁶ The number of dedicatory

inscriptions mentioning the donation of funds for such structures is small. Most of them mention making a donation to a theater; some provide details of the donor's name, the reason for the donation, and the sum, while others mention only the act of making of a contribution together with the name of the donor. Such munificence, as elsewhere, may have been earmarked for the construction of only part of a building, and therefore the cooperative efforts of several members of the urban aristocracy were required for erecting an entire theater.⁷

One dated inscription from the time of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (165–166 CE), incised on an architrave in the northern theater of Gerasa in the Decapolis, clearly indicates that the building funds came from private benefactions and public revenues.⁸ Titus Flavius contributed 3,000 drachmas to the construction of a block of seats in the southern theater of Gerasa, and another resident in that city paid for its pavement.⁹ An inscription found in the theater in Canatha mentions Marcus Ulpus Lysias, son of Icauros, head of the city council, who of his own free will contributed 10,000 dinars to his beloved birthplace for the construction of an *odeon*. Polybius Quartinus, on the other hand, contributed to the construction of a flight of stairs in this same *odeon*, as well as some other architectural elements whose names have not been preserved in the inscription.¹⁰ Abraamius, son of Zenobis, was responsible in 454 CE for the paving of the old theater in Elusa.¹¹

Individuals or specific groups made donations not only for architectural features, but also statues, altars, and other elements, at times prominently placed so that they could be viewed by the theatergoers. For example, an inscription found in the southern theater of Gerasa bespeaks a group of local actors who donated a statue in honor of Titus Flavius Gerrenus, the city's first *agônothetês*.¹² Altars were donated to theater buildings in several locales. In a theater in Scythopolis, for example, Abselamos, son of Zedokomos, an architect, contributed funds for the construction of an altar, and Germanos dedicated another in honor of Dionysos. In the amphitheater at Eleutheropolis, the altar, which presumably stood in the *sacellum*, was donated by Elcias to Zeus Heliopolites for the salvation of Commodus, while the altars that stood on top of

the *carceres* in the hippodrome of Gerasa were each dedicated by a local citizen to Zeus and in honor of the caesar's family.¹³ Kointos Kaikillios, a comic actor from Antioch-by-Daphne, had a vow to an unknown deity inscribed on a small marble column in the theater of Caesarea Maritima.¹⁴ An inscription in the theater at Philadelphia in the Decapolis partially preserves the name of one donor who erected some kind of apurtenance to the nymphs and muses of the Capitol.¹⁵

Talmudic sources also suggest that the construction of buildings for mass entertainment in Roman Palestine were made possible by contributions from the cities' affluent citizens. One anonymous parable reads: "It can be compared to a young man who came to a city and found the people thereof collecting money for charity, and when they asked him also to subscribe, he went on giving until they had to tell him that he already gave enough. Further on his travels, he lighted on a place where they were collecting for a theater, and when asked to contribute toward it, he was also so generous that he had to be told, enough."¹⁶

In another midrash, Rabban Gamaliel describes Roman government as those who deplete man's money in four ways: "by its tolls, bathhouses, theaters, and crop taxes."¹⁷ Even though Rabban Gamaliel does not explicitly mention whose money the government was depleting—either that of the ordinary people who were obliged to pay their taxes, or that of the wealthy—the reference appears to be to the latter. A man's financial capability was a significant factor in his election to municipal office, as it is assumed that he would contribute from his own funds to the establishment and operation of public edifices.¹⁸ It is against this background that one should also understand R. Yoḥanan's criticism in the third century CE of Rome's *modus operandi*: "And, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man (Dan. 7:8)—this alludes to the wicked state, which casts an envious eye upon a man's wealth, [saying]: So-and-so is wealthy, we will make him an *archon* (a city magistrate); So-and-so is wealthy, let us make him a *bouleutes* (a councilor)."¹⁹

Unlike the situation elsewhere in the Roman world, the meager amount of epigraphical finds in our region does not allow us to assess the construction costs of the local theaters, hippodromes, or amphitheaters.

Thus, we have no way of determining a city's ability to finance building projects or complete them in a reasonable amount of time that would meet the satisfaction of a city's leaders and inhabitants.²⁰ The impressive remains of buildings scattered throughout ancient Palestine and Arabia serve as silent testimony to the fact that each city withstood the economic burden and built at least one such building, sometimes more, each according to its abilities and resources. A comparison between the size of a theater or hippodrome, and especially its seating capacity, with the estimated size of a city's population indicates that there was a relative correspondence between a building's dimensions and the number of inhabitants in its locale.²¹ It appears that in most cases cities constructed their buildings for mass entertainment based on their needs and economic means.

The theaters in ancient Palestine, the Decapolis, and Arabia may be divided by size into three groups. The first includes especially large theaters having a diameter of 90–100 meters and a seating capacity ranging between seven thousand and nine thousand.²² The largest of the theaters in the region, measuring about 110 meters in diameter, stood in Neapolis. Other theaters in this group include those in Philadelphia, Bostra, Caesarea, and Scythopolis. The theaters in the second group, each having a smaller diameter, measuring between 60 and 80 meters, and containing about twenty-five hundred to five thousand seats, are in Gadara (north), Abila, Gerasa (south), Sepphoris, Samaria, and Dor. The theaters in the third group, sometimes identified as *odea*, ranged in diameter from 20 to 55 meters and held an estimated one thousand to two thousand seats. Such theaters stood in Gadara (west), Shuni-Maiumas, Caesarea, Hammat Gader, Adraha, Capitolias, Canatha, Philippopolis, Philadelphia, Pella, Birketein, Scythopolis, and Dion.

The hippodromes in the region, like the theaters, did not have a uniform size. In Bostra and Caesarea (east), the hippodromes were especially large, holding about thirty thousand seats. The estimated size of the hippodrome in Bostra was 134 by 440 meters, while that in Caesarea measured 90 by 450 meters. In comparison, the hippodrome in Neapolis was slightly smaller, measuring 76 by 320 meters, with a capacity of between fifteen

thousand and sixteen thousand seats. The small hippodromes include the Herodian buildings in Caesarea (69×312 m) and Gerasa (76×261 m), each of which held about ten thousand seats.

Our data indicate that in most cases there was a direct correspondence between the dimensions of a building and the size of a city. Large-size theaters and hippodromes were built in *metropoleis*—Caesarea, Scythopolis, and Bostra—boasting large populations. This scale of construction characterized not only the centers of the provinces that served as seats of the imperial government, but was also contingent upon the size of the city, the number of its inhabitants, its economic capability to fulfill these needs, as well as the importance of the city and its desire to gain cultural renown.²³ At least one of these reasons undoubtedly prompted the construction of a large theater in Philadelphia and Neapolis. Other cities, no less culturally and socially important but having a smaller population in comparison to the *metropoleis*, built medium-size theaters and smaller hippodromes. Construction on such a scale does not necessarily indicate a lesser disposition toward the theater, the hippodrome, and their diverse performances but rather is linked, here too, to the same reasons mentioned above. Small theaters from the third group were built in the small cities as well as in the cultic and therapeutic centers on the outskirts of the large ones, such as Ḥammāt Gader, Shuni-Maiumas, Birketein, and Canatha. It appears that within the confines of several of the large cities, such as Caesarea, Scythopolis, Philadelphia, and Gadara, sometimes two theaters were built—a large one for performances and a second, small one, an *odeon*, for musical events, lectures, and civic gatherings.²⁴ The existence of two theaters in one city, which at times also had a hippodrome, undoubtedly attests to the substantial financial means to cover costs of planning and constructing such buildings, as well as the long-term financing of the performances themselves, thereby reflecting the wishes of the city's leadership to provide for the cultural needs of its inhabitants.

Once it was decided to build a theater, hippodrome, or amphitheater in a city, its execution was not always easy. This probably involved the recruitment of considerable resources, as well as the allotment of an ap-

propriate space within the city's layout, an initial design of the building, ordering construction materials, hiring skilled laborers, as well as engineering and administrative supervision of the project—all this while making sure that it would be completed in as short a time as possible. This was undoubtedly an enormous, complicated, and ongoing undertaking in terms of the ancient world, stretching over a long period and sometimes carried out in several stages—even though the available data tell us that in ancient Palestine, as elsewhere in the Roman world, the duration of a building project could not always be estimated.²⁵ Construction of the theater, hippodrome, or amphitheater was often halted because of financial setbacks, a lack of building materials, or faulty work. Pliny the Younger, consul of Bithynia-Pontus in Asia Minor, for example, reports in a letter to Trajan on the constructional faults discovered in the course of work on the theater in Nicaea and asks for his advice on how to proceed.²⁶

Financing difficulties and high costs dictated the pace of construction and certainly influenced, in ancient Palestine as well, the decision whether to terminate construction altogether, to make do with something partial, or to build gradually, over time. The excavators at Aphek-Antipatris offer several reasons why the construction of the *odeon* there was never completed.²⁷ This was also the case with the hippodrome in Gadara in the Decapolis, where only the northern *cavea* was completed.²⁸ It is possible, however, that the construction in Gadara was aborted owing to a lack of interest, but since it was possible to use the one built *cavea* and, at the same time, make the racecourse usable by simple means in order to hold regular races, it is quite reasonable to assume that financial problems, and not something else, were responsible for halting construction of the local hippodrome.

At times the construction of the theater structure was completed but some interior architectural features were added later on. In the southern theater of Gerasa, dated to the reign of Domitian, the *scaena* was built in Trajan's time; and in the theater of Bostra, built in the second century CE, the *scaenae frons* was added in the Severan period.²⁹ The three inscriptions discovered in the northern theater of Gerasa inform us of the

nature and pace of the architectural modifications made in the building in the latter second and early third centuries CE, which changed its purpose, enlarged its area, and embellished the *scaena*.³⁰ Three building stages were discerned in the theater in Scythopolis, where the area of the building was expanded and the number of seats was enlarged significantly, in addition to the smaller repairs made over time.³¹ In the hippodrome in Caesarea, the western *cavea* was expanded at a later stage, a *sacellum* was added, and the *carceres* were designed several times in the first and early second centuries CE.³² The renovations made in other buildings were sometimes limited. In the amphitheater in Eleutheropolis, for example, renovations focused on widening the vaults that supported the *cavea* and raising the entrances to the *vomitoria* on the eastern and western sides of the façade. In the northern theater in Gerasa, an architrave and roof were added in the days of Severus Alexander and Iulia Mamaea. And in the theater in Elusa, the floor of the orchestra was replaced in 454 CE.³³

The small number of dedicatory inscriptions in ancient Palestine generates some uncertainty as to who the benefactors were and what the nature and size of their donations were, however the many buildings that survived throughout the region attest, even indirectly, to a city's success in allocating the appropriate resources for building one or several structures within its boundaries, according to the municipality's needs and financial capabilities. The initial building stages and later renovations noted at several sites attest to the intensity of the changing needs over time and the capability to raise additional resources for repair, expansion, and decoration of the buildings. The beauty and splendor of these structures were a source of pride to the city and fostered its local citizens' allegiance, whereas the festivals, games, competitions, and performances held in these buildings afforded them an honorable reputation near and far.

Competitions and Other Performances in Ancient Palestine

Festivals and games were held in many cities throughout the Eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, and attending them was a mark of the

populace's willingness to embrace the Graeco-Roman urban culture and adapt it to one's provincial lifestyle. Although these events witnessed a revival during the first centuries of the Common Era, their program followed earlier traditions. The various competitions performed at these festivals and games, as described in previous chapters, fell into two main categories—"sacred crown games" (*agônes hieroi kai stephanitai*) and "prize games" (*agônes thematikoi*)—although sometimes the extent of the program varied from place to place depending on local tastes, the resources found for covering costs, or even the particular interests of a donor. The nature of the festivals in the Roman period bore a different character, wherein the contests became the main feature of these events. Festivals and games organized by the cities and endorsed by the benefactors of the urban elite promoted political agendas, were identified with Greek culture, conveyed loyalty to the Roman authorities, and at times even served the needs of the local patrons.³⁴

While the buildings discovered in many cities of ancient Palestine attest to the diverse activity that expanded over time, the historical, epigraphical, and papyrological sources, although few in number, exhibit another dimension of the festivals and games held in the region, the types of competitions that took place there, and the prizes awarded to the winners of these events. These sources commemorate primarily the winners of athletic competitions; only a few of them refer to other events by name. The limited scope of the games and performances in each place should not be concluded from the above, but rather ascertained from the quality of the finds. It is probable that the games and festivals in ancient Palestine, as elsewhere in the Roman East, included various types of events—athletic and artistic competitions, and at times also horse and chariot races.³⁵ They were held with regular frequency and lasted several consecutive days.³⁶ At times these were celebrated on a large scale, with a procession and a major sacrifice followed by a range of performances and contests.

Various types of performances and competitions intended for diversion but not connected to the official festivals and games were occasionally held in the region, including mime and pantomime, chariot

races and amphitheatrical shows. These lasted from one to several days and were initiated by local magistrates and other members of the urban aristocracy both to commemorate a special occasion and to entertain the citizens.³⁷ The inscriptions found in the region rarely record the existence of such amusing shows; however, some literary testimonies may suggest that these performances were very appealing and quite common, and were held regularly in the cities of ancient Palestine, the Decapolis, and Arabia.

The participants invited to the quinquennial games (or, according to our reckoning, games held every four years) that Herod the Great founded in Jerusalem in 28 BCE in honor of Augustus hailed from the wider Roman Empire and were ensured valuable prizes awarded “not only to the winners in gymnastic games but also to those engaged in music and those who are called *thymelikoi*. . . . He [Herod] also offered considerable gifts to drivers of four-horse and two-horse chariots and to those mounted on race horses” (*Ant.* 15.267–274).³⁸ The king established games in honor of the emperor in Caesarea in 10 BCE to commemorate his victory in the battle of Actium in 31 BCE.³⁹ The games in Jerusalem and Caesarea, as elsewhere in the Roman East, included athletic, equestrian, and artistic competitions, to which the king added amphitheatrical shows. Agrippa held theatrical performances in Caesarea in honor of the emperor.⁴⁰ Athletic and artistic competitions were also held at the beginning of the second century CE, during the games established for Trajan in Gerasa. Games in honor of emperors were also held in Gaza for Hadrian, in Caesarea for Severus, and in Damascus (the Olympic Sebastian games in the third century CE) in honor of several emperors.⁴¹

The number of cities that organized games, sometimes attracting athletes from other places in the Eastern provinces, is not great, despite the fact that every city in ancient Palestine and Arabia had at least one theater, and some a hippodrome and even an amphitheater. The games here, as elsewhere, were divided into two types, and both were at times held even in one city. The “sacred crown games” were held in Gaza and Bostra.⁴² Josephus attests that Herod held the *agônes thematikoi* in Jerusalem and Caesarea, where he awarded especially large monetary

prizes.⁴³ Games in a similar format were held in the mid-second century CE in Damascus, Tyre, Caesarea, Neapolis, Scythopolis, Gaza, Paneas, and Philadelphia-in-Arabia; Aelius Aurelius Menander of Aphrodisias participated in and won monetary prizes at the competitions in all these places.⁴⁴ Aurelius Septimius Eirenaïos of Laodicea won two types of competitions in the early third century CE: in Caesarea and Tyre he was awarded a wreath, and in Ascalon, Scythopolis, and Tyre a monetary prize.⁴⁵ An inscription found in the Siq in Petra, which mentions the *panegyriarchês* (president of the festival of the *Adrāenoi*), serves as indirect evidence for the holding of games at Adraha, most probably in the second half of the second century CE.⁴⁶

The many games held throughout the Roman East attracted the best athletes, and those who wished to gain fame and glory traveled from city to city. The games in ancient Palestine were intended primarily for the local inhabitants, but contenders from outside the region also came to participate in the competitions, sometimes emerging victorious.⁴⁷ This information comes from several inscriptions and papyri discovered outside of ancient Palestine that mention by name the games and places in which their local athletes participated, won, and brought honor to themselves and their city. As noted, Herod wished to attract famous people to the games in his kingdom, promising them large prizes. The two athletes mentioned above came from abroad—one from Aphrodisias in the mid-second century CE and the other from Laodicea in the early third century CE. An athlete from Tralles in Asia Minor participated in games held in Damascus in the second century CE, and Alexandrians won competitions held in Gerasa in the early third century CE.⁴⁸ Melito, a kithara player from Aphrodisias, participated in the competitions held in Caesarea and Damascus in the early third century CE.⁴⁹ An athlete from Hermopolis in Egypt participated in the Olympic games held in Bostra during the reign of the emperor Gallienus, and another one from the same city won in the Isolympic games held in Gaza.⁵⁰ Valerius Eiectus from Sinope in Asia Minor participated in the competitions held at that time in Damascus, Tyre, and Sidon.⁵¹ Not only did athletes from abroad come to participate in the competitions in our region, but local athletes

competed in and even won games held in Graeco-Roman cities outside of ancient Palestine. Aurelius Philadelphos, a boxer from Paneas, won competitions in Didyma in the third century CE, and another athlete from the same city won a footrace in Rhodes.⁵²

The following examination of the available sources affords a wider look at the competitions and performances held in several cities of ancient Palestine. The rise in the number of places in which festivals and games were held at the end of the second century CE and into the third, a common phenomenon in other regions of the Roman Empire as well,⁵³ corresponds to the increase in the number of theaters and hippodromes in the region in this period (see above, Chap. 2).

As noted, Herod established games in honor of Augustus in Caesarea in 10 BCE.⁵⁴ Agrippa died in late 43 or early 44 CE when attending the celebrations commemorating the fourteenth anniversary of Herod's founding of the Caesarea games in honor of Augustus.⁵⁵ The games continued at least until 221 CE, as testified by an inscription from Laodicaea that mentions the victory of Aurelius Septimius Eiraneos in the "Isactium" games held in the city at that time.⁵⁶ The inscription also records that the same athlete won the "world Severan Pythian games" in Augusta Caesarea. It is also at this time that the aforementioned kithara player, Melitos of Aphrodisias, participated in and won the games (*actia?*) in Caesarea Stratonos.⁵⁷ *Agônes thematikoî*—"prize games"—were held in the city in the second century CE, when Aelius Aurelius Menander of Aphrodisias won a men's *pankration* match.⁵⁸ *Agônes hieroi kai stephanitai*—"the sacred crown games"—were still held in the city in the early fourth century CE and are depicted on the Caesarea bronze cup as well as mentioned by the city's church father, Eusebius.⁵⁹

Competitions were conducted in Gaza during the festival in honor of Hadrian,⁶⁰ and the Isolympic games mentioned in one papyrus from Hermopolis in Egypt were established in the city most probably in the third century CE, either in the time of Caracalla or Elagabalus, or later, during the reign of Gordian III, Valerian, or Gallienus.⁶¹ Aelius Aurelius Menander of Aphrodisias won a contest in Gaza in the mid-second century CE, and Aurelius Serenus from Hermopolis participated in the Iso-

lympic games held in the city in the time of Gallienus.⁶² Chariot races were held in the city's hippodrome in the fourth century CE, while religious festivals and performances were conducted there in the early sixth century—although the nature of these games was already a far cry from the original Roman format.⁶³

Athletic and artistic contests were held in Gerasa in the Decapolis in the early second century to honor Trajan.⁶⁴ Two additional inscriptions found in conjunction with the *propylaea* of the temple of Artemis, although not in situ, list victors of the games held in the city in the early third century CE.⁶⁵ Two winning charioteers are listed among the athletes, indicating that chariot races were included in the repertoire of contests held in the city, as befitting Greek tradition.

Several games were held in Bostra, the capital of Provincia Arabia, in the second and third centuries CE, which attracted contenders throughout the Roman Empire. One early third-century CE inscription from Ostia mentions a man who was honored by the erection of a statue in his hometown because of his victory in the Actian games in Bostra.⁶⁶ These games, commemorating Augustus's victory in the battle of Actium, continued to be held in the city in the mid-third century CE, when they were dedicated to the Nabataean god Dushara. The full name of the games, *Actia Dusaria*, appears inside a wreath on the reverse of the city coins from the days of Philip II (245/246 CE), Etruscus (249/250 CE), Trajan Decius (249/250 CE), and Herennius Etruscus (251 CE).⁶⁷ Olympic games established during the reign of Valerianus or Gallienus were also held in Bostra, where, as noted, an athlete from Hermopolis in Egypt participated and won.⁶⁸

The Financing of Games—Euergetism and Local Honor

Herod financed the competitions and performances in Jerusalem and Caesarea. Agrippa I, too, funded the performances he held in Berytus, and it may be assumed that such was also the case in Caesarea, although Josephus does not mention this explicitly.⁶⁹ The financing of the festivals and games, as well as the construction of buildings in the autonomous

kingdoms, were in the king's domain; however, everywhere else the municipal institutions were responsible for the organization and funding of the performances and competitions held in the Graeco-Roman cities. Monies for competitions and games were taken from the city's treasury or were donated by the emperor, but for the most part they were contributions of the urban wealthy, local aristocrats, and magistrates who dedicated a considerable sum of money, at times upon assuming a position in the municipal administration.⁷⁰ These donations expressed the will of the wealthy to do good deeds (*euergetism*) for their cities' inhabitants. Nevertheless, the motive for making such donations was not always purely altruistic, but sometimes stemmed from the wealthy's love of honor and their wish to gain the wider public's recognition and favor, or even to promote their political and cultural agendas in their cities.⁷¹ Sometimes there were single performances that were funded independently, at times as a liturgy (obligatory expenditure) imposed upon a civil magistrate who was responsible not only for covering the costs of the event, but also for tending to all the needs of the performances and games.⁷²

To date, no dedicatory inscriptions attesting to the manner of funding the competitions and games have been discovered in ancient Palestine that resemble those known, for example, in Greece and Asia Minor. Nevertheless, the funding of the various performances after the Herodian era, when the number of buildings for mass entertainment rose considerably, was, for the large part, made possible in ancient Palestine, as elsewhere in the Roman Empire, by the donations of the urban wealthy. The epigraphical finds are absent in our region, but it emerges from the few relevant rabbinic sources (see below) that the games in ancient Palestine were funded in ways similar to those known in other regions.

The range of sources cited earlier in our discussion of the financing of public construction may also apply, albeit indirectly, to the holding of various performances. One parable describing a donation made for gladiatorial contests may offer information about the ways of financing other types of games. "It is like a man who came to a city (*מדינה*) where he heard that a *philotimia* (gladiatorial exhibition) was about to be held.

He asked a gladiator, ‘When will the *philotimia* take place?’ He replied: ‘It is far off yet.’ Then he asked the one who was to give the *philotimia* and he replied: ‘Soon.’ He then said: ‘Did I not ask the gladiator this, yet he said, “It is far off”?’ He replied: ‘Is this your sense, to ask the gladiator? Is he then anxious for me to stage the *philotimia*, knowing as he does that he may be slain when he descends into the arena?’⁷³ This homily describes the giving of a donation for games—*philotimia*—a term also found in inscriptions from Asia Minor.⁷⁴ The homilist who used this term—which appears only here in rabbinic literature—certainly knew from up close the reality in ancient Palestine, one in which the love of honor and munificent gifts were motives for contributing to the games. The act of *philotimia* is mentioned in dedicatory inscriptions from outside of ancient Palestine, as alluded to in our parable, but it is also defined by the types of performances held as a result of such donations. The mention of the gladiator in this parable links the donation to a gladiatorial combat, but it seems that this *philotimia* was designated in ancient Palestine to fund other performances and games. The rumor of the “*philotimia* in the city” (מגדלִיָּה) in rabbinic literature⁷⁵ is not coincidental, but is connected to the way in which performances were publicized among the city’s inhabitants. The announcement of performances together with the name of the donor spread throughout the city several days or weeks before the events themselves, by word of mouth or even by written announcements posted on the walls of houses or in the streets, as was also done in Pompeii.⁷⁶

Imposing a liturgy on the city’s inhabitants or on its distinguished members was another way to fund performances in the Roman world; this was customarily done in ancient Palestine as well, as emerges from the statement of one rabbi who notes the words of the gentile nations to Israel: “Go and bring us wolves and lions and bring them into our house of contests, and with them we will make fights of wild beasts.”⁷⁷ Rarely were the performances funded by the emperor or the governors of the province, as is evident from the homily of R. Efes delivered in Antioch: “This may be compared to a king who entered a province, and its inhabitants praised him, which pleased him; thereupon he entertained them

with many foot races and charioteers. Subsequently they angered him, whereupon he curtailed the foot races and charioteers.⁷⁷⁸ This was the situation in Caesarea as well, according to Eusebius, where Maximinus presented performances of lavish dimensions in the early fourth century CE.⁷⁹ Conducting competitions with imperial funds or suspending them on some occasions, as expressed by R. Efes, was an effective tool used in the ancient world by a ruling power to gain popularity or to punish the recalcitrant.⁸⁰

The Organization of Events and Performers

The municipalities organized the festivals and games and also appointed the personnel charged with their management. The *agônothetês* stood at the head of these events and was responsible for commissioning local and foreign athletes and actors, tending to their needs, and supervising the practical aspects of the competition and game programs during the festivals.⁸¹ He, in turn, was given the honor of opening the games and even awarding the prizes to the winners. The *agônothetês*'s personal involvement and engagement with winners and losers alike were a prerequisite for ensuring the success of the games. This clearly emerges from an inscription in honor of Titus Flavius Gerrenus, the first *agônothetês* of Gerasa in the second century CE.⁸² Flavius Flaccus, another *agônothetês* in Gerasa, was the head of the games during the reign of Hadrian.⁸³ The *agônothetês* was appointed only for the preparation of the festival and in most cases was not a permanent position in the municipal administration. The competitions and games were often held in the city during religious festivities, when the *panegyriarchês*—the president of the festival—was responsible for overseeing all the events taking place at this time. The names of some *panegyriarchai* responsible for the festivities held in their hometown Adraha were found incised on the walls of the Siq in Petra.⁸⁴ To these should be added Lucius Senlius Modestus, the holy herald from Gadara, who in all probability filled some sort of position in the festivals in his city.⁸⁵

Several pieces of evidence beyond those already noted add a few details about the training, origin, and management of the performers, athletes, and gladiators in the Roman arena. This information further reinforces a conclusion advanced in this chapter—namely, that the performances and competitions in ancient Palestine were not noticeably different from anywhere else in the Roman East.⁸⁶

Only a few isolated performers, including several Jews, are known by name. Most of them were local residents, but some came from other cities in the Roman East to perform on the theater stages of ancient Palestine. The actors received remuneration for their performances at times that did not necessarily coincide with the organized competitions.⁸⁷ This was the case regarding one Pantokakos who met R. Abbahu in Caesarea in the early fourth century CE and, as mentioned earlier, described his role in the theater to him. One day, so he relates to R. Abbahu, a Jewish woman was seeking employment in the theater. Lurking behind the columns of the *scaenae frons* while Pantokakos was working there, she asked him to hire her so she could earn enough money to save her husband.⁸⁸ Pantokakos, who wished to spare the woman the immorality of theater life, sold his personal belongings and gave her money to replace what she would have earned were she to participate in a performance.

The performers throughout the Roman world, called “artists in the service of Dionysos,” were organized in associations and included singers, musicians, and actors, as well as poets and playwrights.⁸⁹ Dionysos is identified as the patron of the performers, and in the imperial era he was joined by the emperor. Gerasa is the only city in the entire region where evidence has been preserved of a local society of performers associated with the sacred guild of the ecumenical, victorious, crowned artists in the service of Dionysos and Trajan. The members of the sacred guild donated funds to set up a statue in honor of the aforementioned Titus Flavius Gerrenus and placed it in the city’s southern theater (Figure 4.1).⁹⁰ The long inscription incised on the pedestal speaks of the power of the local guild in its declaration that whoever will perform in

the theater must bring wreaths to the statue and whoever fails to do so “shall pay as penalty, at the time of festivals, twenty-five denarii to the association, and at other times, the same amount to the city.”

At times the theater performers worked in small groups of several people with musical and theatrical skills. At their head stood a person, himself a performer by profession, who was responsible for all matters concerning the group, including the hiring of new performers, teaching and training them during rehearsals, and even providing performances and performers to all who requested their services at any time, in the city and beyond. This same person sometimes filled one of the main roles in the performance; beside him were actors who portrayed various characters, as well as musicians who appropriately accompanied the performances. One such group, from Dura Europos, had forty-seven different types of performers; whereas in Egypt, which had similar associations, the makeup of another group was much smaller.⁹¹ Epigraphical evidence relating to a group of performers has not yet been discovered in ancient Palestine, but the picture emerging from the rabbinic sources alludes that it probably resembled such associations elsewhere in the Roman Empire. The central role of the group’s head during the performance, relative to the rest of the performers, is the basis for the homily of the third-century rabbis describing God’s coronation by the righteous in the days to come. God is described there as ראש חולה (the head of a *chora*) responsible for the performers and dance choreography while the performers dance around him. Their performance was a metaphorical interpretation of Psalm 48:14–15: “and they will dance around Him like young maidens and point to Him, as it were, with a finger, saying: ‘This is God, our God, forever and ever; He will lead us with youthfulness.’”⁹² Pantokakos, too, mentioned earlier, was no ordinary stage performer, but also led such a group.⁹³ His responsibilities, as he described them to R. Abbahu, included decorating the theater, engaging theater actors, and teaching them how to perform and play music during the performances. The woman mentioned above, knowing his stature, approached him for work in the theater.



FIGURE 4.1 A long inscription incised on a pedestal in the southern theater of Gerasa mentions a group of local actors who donated a statue in honor of Titus Flavius Gerrenus (photo by Zeev Weiss).

Athletic training in the Roman period took place in the gymnasium or bathhouse, which had *palaestra* and other rooms for training and educating the athletes.⁹⁴ A gymnasium has not yet been discovered in the region, but it seems that at least part of the training took place, as it did in other cities of the Roman East, in the urban bathhouses, which had a large peristyle courtyard resembling the *palaestra*.⁹⁵ The existence of this institution in several cities of ancient Palestine and the Decapolis, whether in an independent building or as part of a monumental bathhouse, is corroborated by epigraphical finds (see below).

Throughout the Roman Empire, the gymnasiarch heading the gymnasium was responsible for training and educating the athletes.⁹⁶ Two gymnasiarchs in the Decapolis, each in office for six months, are mentioned in two mid-first-century CE inscriptions from Gerasa, while another one performed the same duty in Philadelphia in the following century.⁹⁷ Seleucus, son of Ariston the *aleiptes*, is mentioned three times in inscriptions from mid-third-century CE Scythopolis. He was responsible not only for providing oils to the gymnasium so the athletes could anoint their bodies before and after their exercises, but also trained them.⁹⁸ A notable *xystarches* (president of the gymnasium) from Antioch-on-the-Orontes visited Gerasa in the second or early third century CE in connection with athletic contests held in the city and received a special honor for his good deeds in the local gymnasium.⁹⁹ Besides attesting to the existence of such positions in several cities in the region, these inscriptions imply that certain locales may have operated a gymnasium or some other sort of building, most probably a spacious bathhouse with a *palaestra*, for training the local athletes.

Very little is known about the origin and social status of the local athletes in ancient Palestine, although some gained renown owing to their success in the arena and received special recognition and honor inscribed for posterity, and at times even a statue was erected in their honor by fellow citizens in their hometowns.¹⁰⁰ The local athletes in ancient Palestine, as elsewhere in the Roman East, probably belonged to an association headed by a *xystarches*, a professional athlete, although no inscriptions revealed thus far in the region have been able to prove such a theory.¹⁰¹

Our sources provide almost no information about the charioteers, most of whom remain anonymous, although some hailed from abroad. Chariot racing in Palestine in the first centuries CE, as emerges from the account of Italicus in Gaza, followed the tradition prevalent in the Hellenistic period.¹⁰² These races were supported by private benefactors who sometimes owned horses and had the facilities to train charioteers. Participation in the races was not restricted to certain groups, as in Rome and the Western empire, but was open to individuals—as in Gerasa, for example, where an inscription honors two charioteers listed among the athletes who won in the local games.¹⁰³

Only later, in late antiquity, were the circus factions—the Blues and the Greens—introduced into ancient Palestine, significantly changing the character and organization of competitions in the region.¹⁰⁴ In late antique Caesarea, special officials (*hippotrophoi*) were responsible for maintaining the stables and distributing imperial funds among the various factions in the city.¹⁰⁵ A few inscriptions found in Jerusalem, Scythopolis, and Gerasa in the Decapolis, as well as in some other small towns, attest that primarily the Blues were active in the region.¹⁰⁶ The factions were responsible for organizing the races in the local hippodrome, but their role in the cities of the Eastern empire, according to Roueché, was much greater. Acting as a broader association, they absorbed synods of athletes and performers in various cities of the Roman East and were responsible for all forms of entertainment in many locales.¹⁰⁷

To date, not a single inscription relating to amphitheatrical performances in ancient Palestine has been found in the region, but the literary sources, especially rabbinic ones, abound with information about the amphitheater and its performances and fill in for the missing information to some extent. By the Herodian period, criminals, prisoners of war, and slaves were thrown into the arena, as was customary elsewhere in the Roman Empire.¹⁰⁸ According to some second-century rabbis, permission to attend certain gladiatorial combats in the stadium was granted for two reasons: “because [the Jew] cries out to save lives [of the defeated] and because he testifies on behalf of a woman [whose husband is killed in the arena], so she can remarry.”¹⁰⁹ This attests indirectly to a situation at the

end of the Bar-Kokhba revolt, as was the case after the Great Revolt, when some of the Jewish prisoners of war were executed in an arena, sometimes as gladiators (*damnati ad ludum*), or were devoured there by fierce animals (*damnati ad bestias*).¹¹⁰ Eusebius recounts that many of the Christians persecuted during Diocletian's reign were executed in the arena in Caesarea, and Ammianus Marcellinus comments that in the mid-fourth century CE those condemned for high treason were executed in Scythopolis.¹¹¹

In the mid-third century CE, when the Roman Empire, including Palestine, found itself in an economic crisis, many sought to take part in gladiatorial contests for the handsome monetary rewards being offered. The search for sources of income during this crisis, as well as the desire to gain glory indirectly related to legal or social status, led certain people, including Jews, to offer their services as gladiators or animal baiters. Resh Laqish, a Palestinian sage who was a gladiator in his youth, attests explicitly in the mid-third century CE that large sums of money were paid to those willing to fight in the arena.¹¹² Some third- and fourth-century Palestinian rabbis discussed what would be the consequences for someone who resold himself to a non-Jew, despite the fact that the Talmud explicitly states that if someone "sold himself to gladiators even once, he is not to be redeemed."¹¹³ R. Abbahu's decision to redeem the Jew who sold himself to gladiators, and R. Ami's refusal to do so, are further proof of the scope of this phenomenon in Jewish circles and of the controversies among the rabbis about how one is to relate to those people who acted as they did only because they did not have a choice.

Gladiators were trained in a special school (*ludus*) headed by a *lanista*, who took charge and hired them out to those wishing to hold spectacles.¹¹⁴ In the early fourth century CE, some Christians were sent to the *ludus* in Caesarea to exercise and train as gladiators, but they refused to participate in the activities carried out there.¹¹⁵ Although rabbinic sources do not mention such an institution, the references to some individuals who sold themselves to gladiators may indicate the existence of such a school in which gladiators were trained. R. Ami's above objection to redeem the Jew who sold himself to gladiators was not necessarily

because of the actual sale but rather because while staying with the gladiators he intentionally ate unkosher meat, even in a place in which permissible food was placed before him.¹¹⁶ According to the talmudic story, the man behaved as he normally did, and if this is true, it could only be speculated that he had been staying with an organized group, perhaps a school for gladiators, and that when he sat with everyone to dine he would eat as they would so as not to be conspicuous among those present. It seems that Resh Laqish's story in the Babylonian Talmud also took place in a school for gladiators housing people from all walks of life, some of whom held managerial positions.¹¹⁷ Paulus, who arrived in Scythopolis in the mid-fourth century CE, was "skilled in the work of bloodshed and, just as a trainer of gladiators, seeks profit and remuneration from the traffic of funerals and festivals."¹¹⁸ Paulus's presence in Scythopolis might allude to the existence of a school for gladiators in the city, although it is possible that the city was chosen as a place to execute insurgents and that he was sent there to carry out his mission.

The little evidence we have is hardly ample to provide a full picture of the gladiators and their management prior to their entering the ancient Palestinian arena. The establishment of a number of amphitheaters in the region, as elsewhere in the empire, alludes indirectly to the involvement of some kind of system for recruiting gladiators, training them to use weapons, and helping them participate in shows in those cities, if needed.

The predominance of monumental buildings in the cities of ancient Palestine, the Decapolis, and Arabia—markers of assimilation to the dominant culture—clearly attests to the local inhabitants' great attraction to public entertainment. The funding of construction and holding of performances was initially under the control of the local rulers, the Herodian dynasty in Judaea, and the Nabataean kings within their own realm. Later, with the exposure of the local population of ancient Palestine to the Graeco-Roman forms of entertainment, the cities initiated the

establishment of the buildings and the performances held in them with municipal funds, as was done elsewhere in the empire. The various competitions, performances, and spectacles held throughout the region engaged both local residents and those who came from afar. The available data for this activity in ancient Palestine are far from complete and definitely not on a par with other Graeco-Roman cities, especially with regard to the artistic and epigraphical finds. Nevertheless, the efforts of many cities to establish within their boundaries at least one monumental building for entertainment purposes undoubtedly attests to diverse and wide-ranging cultural activity that increased over time.

Adopting a Novelty: Jewish Attitudes toward Roman Spectacles and Competitions

PUBLIC SPECTACLES IN THEATERS, hippodromes, and amphitheaters were immensely popular in ancient Palestine, as elsewhere in the Roman East, and attracted large urban populations who attended them regularly. At first they were held in only isolated places and few came, but with time they gained popularity among most inhabitants of the ancient Palestinian cities, who viewed these shows with a sense of pride and local patriotism. Dignitaries, ordinary people, women, and slaves streamed to the performances, yet even those who did not frequent the buildings for mass entertainment sensed the festive atmosphere enveloping their city. Noise, excitement, and commotion were evident everywhere, especially near the buildings in which the performances were held. Streets, public buildings, and marketplaces at times remained desolate while the roar of the crowds at the games echoed far and wide, even from the distant buildings on the outskirts of the city.

The vibrancy of the Roman city was not alien to the Jews, who in the first centuries CE were an important demographic component of ancient Palestine's indigenous population. Like the other inhabitants of the country, they witnessed the cultural revolution Herod generated in his realm and responded to the performances, spectacles, and competitions in

their midst, whether in Jerusalem or Caesarea at the beginning of this period or immediately thereafter, in Tiberias and Sepphoris, and even Scythopolis and Gaza. Samuel Krauss, for example, maintained in his *Persia and Rome in the Tamud and Midrashim* that most Jews—following the rabbis, their spiritual leaders—condemned the Roman public spectacles and “viewed these games as idolatry and steered as far away from them as possible.”¹ The theater, hippodrome, and amphitheater were considered essentially pagan buildings, and therefore frequenting them was strictly forbidden. Even though there was no fear of actual idolatry in them, Jews still refrained from going to these places of entertainment because they had the reputation of being “a seat of scoffers.”²

Ancient texts were not created in a void and therefore cannot be considered mere fiction. They were shaped by the cultural identity of their authors and were at times colored by religious beliefs, social environs, and physical surroundings. It is the aim of this chapter to use the wealth of information embedded in rabbinic literature in our examination of Jewish society and its relationship to the Roman games. Through this literature, which was created in the course of the second to early fifth centuries CE, this chapter will assess the degree to which the Jews were familiar with the public entertainments of their time, as well as their active participation in them—either as performers or spectators—and will attempt to reconstruct the attitudes of the rabbis toward Graeco-Roman forms of entertainment in response to the behavior of the Jewish community.

The relevance of rabbinic literature in drawing an accurate picture of Jewish society in ancient Palestine has been called into question by various scholars in recent years.³ They deem that the rabbis were a marginal group, having limited ties with Jewish society at large, and therefore did not play a major role in its communal life; their literature was composed within the confines of the *bet midrash* (house of study), which largely represented their circles. Yet rabbinic literature is an important resource for compiling information about some of the social practices of the non-rabbinic Jewish population in late antique Palestine—the local elite, *‘ammei ha’arets*, and the commoners⁴—and, in addition, provides inval-

able information for contextualizing Jewish life in ancient Palestine. This does not mean that rabbinic Judaism was always synonymous with Jewish society; these sources neither shaped reality nor represented the common knowledge or spoken language of late antique Jewry. Rather, simply because this is the main literary source we have at our disposal regarding Jewish society at this time, it is through the eyes of the rabbis that we are able to gain a closer look at daily life in the region. Although it expresses the rabbis' negative view of the Roman spectacles, this literature also provides many authentic depictions of the popular cultural behavior with which the rabbis had become familiar while living in its midst. The rabbis, from their vantage point as communal leaders, emphasized the behavior they considered desirable for their communities; however, there is no evidence of how the Jewish population did in fact respond to their criticism. Our understanding of the cultural impact the Roman games had upon the Jewish population in ancient Palestine would be lacking had we no access to rabbinic literature or were we to ignore it.

Public Performances within the Jewish Realm

Over time, the performances held in the monumental Herodian buildings created a new cultural reality in ancient Palestine. Barring the populace's criticism of the king, Jewish society of the first century CE, which was largely rural, appears to have had minimal daily contact with the games.⁵ The religious leaders of this era did not take a position for or against the performances held in the region. Furthermore, it is difficult to know whether the silence of the sources is connected to the quantity and quality of the documents from this period or if it reflects a certain social behavior characterizing the first century CE. Even if some of the Jews of Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Tiberias attended performances, it was not the large-scale social phenomenon it had become later on.⁶

While most of the buildings for mass entertainment were constructed in the pagan cities of ancient Palestine after the suppression of the Great Revolt against Rome, it has become clear from talmudic literature and

other sources that the Jews did in fact frequent these spectacles from the second century on. Opposition to Jewish participation in the Roman performances is recorded for the first time among the rabbis of the Ushan generation in the mid-second century CE in response to the growing cultural expression that had emerged in the region after 70 CE. Urbanization in this period, as well as the massive construction of theaters, hippodromes, and amphitheaters, seems to have had an impact on the behavior of Jewish society and changed its attitudes toward such leisure activities.⁷ The diversions offered in a pagan city that boasted such monumental buildings were alluring to its inhabitants, and it may be assumed that the Jewish communities of Caesarea, Scythopolis, Gaza, and Eleutheropolis, for example, were no exception. Buildings of this type were also constructed in the two major Galilean cities of Tiberias and Sepphoris, indicating that this cultural phenomenon had indeed penetrated the Jewish realm. A theater and a stadium, presumably built by Herod Antipas when he founded the city in 19 CE, were an integral part of Tiberias's landscape, and according to Josephus there was also a hippodrome in nearby Tarichaeae (Figures 1.11 and 6.4). A medium-size theater dating to the early second century was located in Sepphoris along the northern slope of the hill, outside the civic center (Figure 5.1).⁸

The existence of a theater and a stadium in Jewish Galilee raises many questions about the archaeological finds and their implications for understanding the cultural patterns in these cities. Who initiated the construction of buildings for mass entertainment in Tiberias and Sepphoris? Which performances were held there and at what frequency? Who funded them? To what degree was the Jewish population living in these cities involved in the theater or stadium performances? Who among the Jews, if at all, attended these events, and was this a regular occurrence? Hypothetically, the buildings constructed in Tiberias and Sepphoris could have been used primarily by the non-Jewish populations in those cities. It is difficult to determine the ratio of gentiles to Jews in the cities of the Galilee, but it is clear that the Jewish populations in both Tiberias and Sepphoris constituted a relative majority in this period.⁹ The non-Jewish population indeed frequented the buildings for



FIGURE 5.1 Sepphoris. The theater, located on the northern slope of the hill, lies in proximity to the Jewish residences (photo by Gabi Laron).

mass entertainment, but it is doubtful that these edifices served the gentile population alone. The establishment and operation of such buildings was a municipal endeavor. Municipal institutions and often the affluent residents of a city, motivated by their local allegiance, initiated, built, and maintained places of entertainment for the enjoyment of their neighbors.¹⁰ Jews in both Tiberias and Sepphoris were also members of the local municipal leadership, and thus it is probable that those holding administrative positions, as well as affluent citizens, financed the buildings of mass entertainment and the performances themselves.¹¹ It is therefore highly conceivable that these buildings were frequented not only by the gentile population of Tiberias and Sepphoris, but also by Jews, the predominant demographic group in these cities.

The Aramaic *targum* of Deuteronomy 28:19 (“Cursed shall you be in your comings and cursed shall you be in your goings”) reads: “Cursed shall you be when you enter your theaters and your circuses, negating the words of the Law” (Tg. Ps.-J. Deut. 28:19).¹² The *meturgeman*

(translator), using the possessive, emphasizes that it is *your* theaters and *your* circuses being discussed, and therefore certainly addresses the Jews. This goes against the popular expression in rabbinic literature that created a direct connection between the various performances and the non-Jewish population. The *meturgeman*'s words refer to the reality familiar to him in the Jewish cities, where the local residents attended performances in the theater—such as the one discovered in Sepphoris or in the stadium and theater in Tiberias. Otherwise, if he had intended to refer to buildings in non-Jewish cities, he would have written “their.” The interpretation of the verse in the *targum* was not created ex nihilo, but seems to reflect a situation known to both the *meturgeman* and his audience.

None of the sources—historical, epigraphical, or artistic—provides information about the athletic competitions, circus races, theatrical performances, and amphitheatrical shows held in the Galilean cities. The buildings for mass entertainment in the Galilee were located in the cities and were designed and decorated like other such structures in the urban settings of Roman Palestine; it thus follows that all these buildings may have held comparable performances. To date, however, not a single amphitheater has been uncovered in Jewish Galilee. It thus should be concluded that amphitheatrical performances were not held in the region, despite the fact that, compared to other performances, these are often mentioned in rabbinic literature. Theoretically, such performances could have been conducted in the local theater or stadium; however, no evidence has surfaced to date to support such a claim. The absence of amphitheatrical performances in the Galilee conforms largely with the conclusion reached in earlier chapters, that amphitheatrical performances were held only in centers under Roman rule.¹³

Jewish Attendance at the Roman Public Spectacles— Rabbinic Dicta vs. Communal Practice

Nowhere do talmudic sources state explicitly that Jews were spectators or active participants in games and performances. The rabbinic injunc-

tions against such attendance, voiced for the first time by the rabbis of the Ushan generation and thereafter (mid-second century CE onward), as noted, confirm the contemporary reality. Jews residing in both the Jewish and non-Jewish cities of Roman Palestine were unavoidably exposed to Graeco-Roman culture and in fact attended and participated in the games and spectacles despite the rabbis' injunctions to the contrary. Both *tannaim* (rabbis in the first and second centuries CE) and *amoraim* (rabbis in the third to early fifth centuries CE) based their objections to Roman public spectacles on moral and religious grounds, although a careful reading of the sources, to be demonstrated below, indicates a shift in their stance over the course of time.

The *tannaim* expressed an unequivocal disdain for Roman public spectacles, prohibiting any association with them whatsoever. Their staunch attitude is conveyed by words such as "forbidden," "not," and "no," which leave no room for doubt regarding their intention. R. Meir and other rabbis, for instance, agreed that the Roman buildings for public spectacles should not be attended, and even if each rabbi provides a different reason, their position was clear: "He who goes into the theaters of non-Jews is prohibited because of idolatry, says R. Meir. And the sages say: [if one goes into the theater] when they offer sacrifices, it is forbidden because of idolatry. But if not, it is forbidden merely because one would be sitting in the seat of scoffers."¹⁴ The rabbis forbade attending the theaters and circuses not only because of idolatry, but because the activities taking place at both venues are immoral. They believed theatrical performances were arenas of rowdiness, vulgarity, lewdness, and pornography, and were not a proper setting for Jews.¹⁵ The Sifra explains Leviticus 18:3 ("and you shall not follow their statutes") as follows: "you should not follow the ways of the nations in the matters of their laws, such as theaters, circuses, and stadiums. R. Meir says: These are the ways of the Amorite whom the rabbis have specified."¹⁶ Attending Roman public spectacles, as far as R. Meir was concerned, was to conduct oneself in the ways of the Amorites and was forbidden, as it was a foreign custom to be avoided.¹⁷ M 'Avodah Zarah 1, 7 remarks: "None may sell them bears or lions . . . none may help them build a basilica,

scaffold, stadium or judges' tribunal."¹⁸ In other words, Jews are not to sell beasts to non-Jews for animal performances, nor are they to facilitate the building of stadiums for such spectacles.

A slightly different tone seems to emerge from T 'Avodah Zarah 2, 7:

He who goes to the theaters of gentiles. If he goes because of the need of the state, then it is permitted. If he appreciates [what goes on inside], then it is forbidden. If he sits in a stadium (where gladiators fight), then he is guilty of bloodshed. R. Nathan permits [going] on two counts: because [the Jew] cries out to save lives, and because he testifies on behalf of a woman (whose husband is killed in the arena) so she can remarry. . . . They go to the stadiums because [a Jew] will cry out to save lives, and to the circus in order to settle matters of the state, but if he appreciates [what goes on inside], then it is forbidden.¹⁹

This excerpt contains a number of situations in which it was possible, as an exception to the rule, to visit Roman buildings for public entertainment. According to this passage, it seems that the *tannaim's* objection to Jewish participation in performances was not very decisive. The reasons for the permission that was given, as we will see below, do not concern the basic position of the *tannaim*, which had not changed at all, but rather the daily reality in which the Jewish community found itself at that time, especially between the two revolts.

The Tosefta rules that it is possible to go to the theater (beginning) or circus (end) "because of the need of the state" or "in order to settle matters of the state."²⁰ However, "If he appreciates [what goes on inside]"—that is, if this same person went to the buildings for mass entertainment to satisfy his own needs, to enjoy himself, to see and be seen by others, or to cooperate with non-Jews—then it is forbidden.²¹ Permission to visit these buildings for activities fulfilling the needs of the city and its citizens is related to a sociopolitical phenomenon known throughout the Roman world. Municipal matters in the Roman period were handled by the *boule*, whose constituents were the local wealthy inhabitants. The rest of the citizens who did not take part in the decision-making process

expressed their views regarding such matters during the performances and games or directed their requests with either acclamations or cries of derision to the important people in attendance.²² In Rome, such requests were referred to the emperor, and throughout the empire to the governors of the province or the local magistrates. The price of produce, the tax burden or employment issues, as well as other matters related to urban life, were subjects that the citizens of the polis brought before the rulers.²³ It was feared that not fulfilling the citizens' requests would lead to riots in the city, as had happened in the past, forcing the masses' petitions to be addressed and resolved. The uproar of the crowds, which included their appeals, repeated familiar formulae but ultimately were dependent on the audience's ability to improvise. At first the masses blessed the gods and the emperor, mentioning the good name of the ruler and the other dignitaries present, and then they set forth their demands, all the while interjecting words of blessing in the rulers' honor.²⁴

Recognition of the fact that the masses congregating in the buildings for public entertainment had the power to influence and that the Jews could benefit from it is what moved the *tannaim* to permit participation in these events, even if they included watching deviant performances.²⁵ The rabbis did not list the needs or matters of the state that had to be settled in order to give their permission to go to the theater, but it seems that these were affairs concerning city and communal life, including those of the Jews. According to the few available sources, events of a similar nature were held from time to time in ancient Palestine. In the stadium in Caesarea, Pontius Pilate convened the Jews who were embittered about the introduction of military standards into Jerusalem. The people of Tarichaeae gathered in the hippodrome in their city to protest Flavius Josephus's activities during the revolt. Josephus assembled the Tiberians in the city's stadium in an attempt to tell them about the rumor they had heard.²⁶ In all probability, this was also the scenario in other cities of ancient Palestine throughout this era, as we learn from several homilies reflecting a similar reality.²⁷

In the above Tosefta excerpt, R. Nathan mentions two more situations for which it was permissible to go to the stadium: "because [the

Jew] cries out to save lives [of the defeated], and because he testifies on behalf of a woman (whose husband is killed in the arena) so she can remarry.” R. Nathan’s reasons, however, differ from those of the previous instance, which was concerned with “the needs of the state.” After the Great Revolt, or at the end of the Bar-Kokhba revolt, some of the Jewish war captives were executed in the arena, either having been defeated in a gladiatorial combat or devoured by beasts.²⁸ The loud cries of the spectators were meant to encourage the combatants in the arena who, more often than not, were condemned to death.²⁹ The audience’s cries were at times known to have been crucial to the decision made by the emperor, provincial governor, or patron of the game in case of a tie or an unproven loss in the combat.³⁰ This aspect also finds expression later on, with the execution of Christian martyrs. While the pagan crowd demonstrated its hatred for the Christians, the governors who tried the latter wished to bring the condemned men to a state of remorse and an expression of loyalty to the emperor’s cult.³¹ The audience would view the course of the trial and cry out to the governor, beseeching him to reach an immediate judgment: “Kill the atheists, let Polycarp be sent for,” or “The Christians to the lions! What, all of them to one lion?”³² The spectators—having seen Agapius the Martyr from Caesarea thrown into the arena together with another man convicted of murder—shouted with cries of approval when the latter won clemency from the emperor and demanded that both receive a similar trial.³³ The commotion that probably surrounded the execution of the Jewish rebels following the suppression of the two revolts was similar, and it is against the background of such circumstances that the rabbis believed it was permissible to go to that stadium. Consequently, the participation of Jews as spectators at these events was important for a number of reasons: at best, they could cheer for a Jewish captive in a gladiatorial or animal combat; in the case of a tie or a Jewish gladiator’s unproven defeat, the Jewish fans could shout or wave their arms to influence the ruler present at the event in making his judgment. At worst, they could testify to witnessing the death of a Jewish combatant who was killed in the arena so that his wife could be released of her status as an “abandoned wife” and thus remarry.

Generally speaking, tannaitic permission to attend public entertainment events was not a choice, but was meant to meet very specific needs. Permission was granted only if it would bring benefit to the general public or to those specifically undergoing mortal danger. However, as the Tosefta emphasizes twice in the excerpt under discussion, if one “appreciates [what goes on inside], then it is forbidden.” Thus, watching for the purpose of deriving personal pleasure and being entertained was completely forbidden, and the *tannaim* remained steadfast in their basic stance, which totally objected to the Roman public spectacles and strived to remove them outright from Jewish public consciousness.

In principle, the *amoraim* held a view similar to that of the *tannaim*; however, unlike their predecessors, they refrained from harsh condemnation, never used explicit language, and tried to persuade their communities in a nonconfrontational manner. For example, the third-century *amora* R. Simeon ben Pazi said: “Happy is the man who has not gone to theaters and circuses of idolaters, ‘nor has stood in the way of sinners,’ [happy is] he who does not attend contests of wild beasts.”³⁴ R. Simeon ben Pazi does not explicitly prohibit going to the spectacles, nor does he even condemn one who attends them. He simply praises one who does not set foot in such places. At the same time, however, he sends a clear message to others—that it would be preferable if they, too, would also conduct themselves in a like manner. A similar tone is expressed by other *amoraim* of ancient Palestine. Rabbi Levi lists parts of the body that serve man’s desires, saying: “With his feet he can go to the theaters and circuses, while if he wishes he can go to synagogues and houses of study.”³⁵ R. Abba bar Kahana cites the words of the Jewish people pleading before God: “Master of the Universe, I have never entered the theaters and circuses of the nations and have never played with them and rejoiced with them.”³⁶ Elsewhere, R. Abba bar Kahana criticizes the laughter of the non-Jews in the theater and circus: instead of simply saying that one should not frequent these places, he poses a rhetorical question: “‘Of joy. What good is that?’ (Eccles. 2:2). That is, what point would there be in the attendance of the disciples of the rabbis at theaters and circuses?”³⁷ The prayer recited by students upon leaving

the *bet midrash* distinguishes between two types of people—those who go to theaters and circuses and those who refrain from going: “I give thanks to thee, Lord my God, God of my fathers, that you cast my lot with those who sit in the *bet midrash* and the synagogues, and you did not cast my lot with those who sit in the theaters and circuses. For I toil and they toil. I arise early and they arise early. I toil so that I shall inherit [a share of] paradise [in the world to come] and they toil [and shall end up] in a pit of destruction.”³⁸ R. Abbahu’s sermon on the theater and the mime in early fourth-century Caesarea (see above, Chap. 3) continues this line of thought.³⁹ He tries to demonstrate the negative, anti-Jewish aspect of mime performances, hoping it will dissuade his listeners from going to see them; however, he does not give a strict directive forbidding one to attend the theater.

These and similar statements clearly demonstrate the rabbis’ objections to attending Roman public spectacles, while offering reasons to justify their attitudes, such as religious and moral restraints against pagan behavior. At the same time, however, they reflect the reality that members of the Jewish population, just like their non-Jewish neighbors, frequented these institutions on a regular basis. It is improbable that the various halakhic teachings and sermons mentioned earlier were merely the opinion of the rabbis regarding the Roman public spectacles in general, and not their response to the prevalent social reality in which Jews were actively engaged—for if the Jewish population had no contact whatsoever with these places of entertainment, why would the rabbis feel compelled to discuss this issue? It is well known that expressions of opposition among the rabbis often reflected what they viewed as unacceptable social realities. Such was the case within the Christian community as well, whom the church fathers often criticized and reprimanded for pursuing their undesirable behavior. Yet Jews attended Roman public spectacles despite rabbinic objections. The existence of such buildings in Jewish cities, and especially in Sepphoris, where the theater was located in close proximity to Jewish households, may indicate that this “improper behavior” prevailed not only among Jews residing in the pagan cities of ancient Palestine. It appears to have been a behavioral pat-

tern that the rabbis faced first and foremost in their hometowns. The shift in the strategy of the *amoraim*, as opposed to the *tannaim*, reflects this reality. As the Jews now frequented the various performances, both as spectators and participants, the rabbis realized that if they did not change their tactics, their admonition would fall on deaf ears.

The involvement of the Jews in the Roman city's cultural life, including games, is well known in the Diaspora as well.⁴⁰ Philo of Alexandria watched theater performances, chariot races, and athletic competitions held in his city.⁴¹ Elsewhere he notes that on the Sabbath the Jews rest and study Moses's law and do not spend time in the theater—however, this does not mean that they refrained from doing so on the remaining days of the week.⁴² Jews had reserved seats in the theater in Miletus, just as they did in the *odeon* in Aphrodisias and the hippodrome in Tyre.⁴³ According to Christian sources, Jews were present at the execution of the Christian martyrs.⁴⁴ John Chrysostom testifies that the Jews of Antioch loved attending dance performances and chariot races.⁴⁵ Socrates Scholasticus attests that the Jews of early fifth-century CE Alexandria did not work on the Sabbath, and instead of listening to the words of the Torah they chose to attend theatrical and dance performances.⁴⁶ The reliability of the Christian sources may be doubtful, owing to the church fathers' biased agenda, but it does not seem probable that they would have raised such claims had there not been some basis in reality. The other information regarding Jewish attendance at public entertainment events only reinforces the reliability of the Christian sources, even if the latter are at times tendentious.

The Jews of ancient Palestine, like the Jews of the Diaspora, frequented the buildings for public entertainment on all days of the week, even on the Sabbath and holidays. Augustine, like Socrates Scholasticus, remarks that it would be better if the Jews would work their fields on the Sabbath than attend the theater and behave in a disorderly fashion.⁴⁷ Jewish participation in performances, even on the Sabbath, is also alluded to in the sermon of an anonymous rabbi who compares Jewish to non-Jewish holidays: “‘When you added to the nation, O Lord’ (Isa. 26:15). You give the nations of the world holidays and they eat and drink

[recklessly], and they enter their theaters and circuses and anger you, but to the Jews you give holidays and they eat and drink and are joyful, and they enter the synagogues and *batei midrash* and say many prayers.⁷⁴⁸ Both Jews and non-Jews partake of meals on their holidays or festivals and participated in various events; the former went to the synagogue or *bet midrash* whereas the latter attended games. Knowing that some Jews attended the performances even on the holidays, the rabbi offers them to enjoy the feast by eating at home and walking to the synagogue to hear a sermon, rather than entering theaters and circuses and watch the performances. A similar expression—even though the Sabbath is not explicitly mentioned in it—recurr in the sermons of R. Levi and R. Abbahu, who distinguish between attending public performances and sitting in synagogues and houses of study.⁴⁹ The fact that Jews attended the Roman performances even on the Sabbath, as implied by the church fathers, is what led the rabbis to speak up on the subject in their sermons. It appears that these sermons are a reflection of new situations taking shape in Jewish society, where people preferred to attend public performances, even on the Sabbath, instead of sit in synagogues and participate in the religious life there.

Jews on the Theater Stage, on the Racecourse, and in the Arena

Our sources, although meager, indicate that Jews were not only viewers at the games and spectacles, but some were actual participants in the events. The extent of this phenomenon cannot be measured, but it is probable that the active participation of the Jewish population was limited. M. Aurelius Pylades, son of Juda, who had become a celebrated *pantomimus* during the reign of the emperors Valerian and Gallienus, presumably began his career in his hometown of Scythopolis.⁵⁰ Amazônios the *biologos*, a mime mentioned in one of the inscriptions from Bostra in Arabia, was probably a Jew.⁵¹ As mentioned earlier, a Jewish pantomime artist (*pantokakos*), whose real name is unknown, performed

in the early fourth century CE in the theater in Caesarea. This Jew, who rose up from the dregs of Jewish society in Caesarea, had occasion to meet R. Abbahu, relating to him some of the highlights of his career, including having some major roles in the local theater.⁵² As a leading pantomimist, he was also responsible for hiring and coaching theater performers. In one account, he told R. Abbahu of a Jewish woman seeking employment in the theater. Lurking behind the columns of the *scaena frons* while Pantokakos was working there, she asked him to hire her so she could earn enough money to save her husband. Although the participation of Jewish women in the theater cannot be fully deduced from this anecdote, it nevertheless may illustrate that Jews did not abstain from active participation in theatrical performances.

Although there is no clear indication that Jews were charioteers or sportsmen in the athletic competitions held in the hippodromes, the available sources allude to the fact that some Jews were also actively involved in such types of entertainment.⁵³ The author of *Sefer Harazim* (*The Book of the Mysteries*), who lived in Roman Palestine in the third or fourth century CE, suggests an amulet incantation for one who hopes to win in the hippodrome competitions: "If you wish to race horses, (even) when they are exhausted, so they will not stumble in their running . . . take a silver *lamella* and write upon. . . . I adjure you angels of running, who run amid the stars, that you will grid with strength and courage the horses that N is racing and his *heniochos* (charioteer) who is racing them."⁵⁴ The participation of Jewish riders in chariot races in the fifth- and sixth-century CE circus factions (the Blues and Greens) is suggestive of this phenomenon in the Roman period as well.⁵⁵ The prohibition against going on the Sabbath to the *Kordima*, the arena where combat sports took place, implies that it was permissible to attend such activities on other days of the week, intimating that Jews indeed may have participated in athletic competitions.⁵⁶

Most of the sources linking individual members of Jewish society to the Roman spectacles relate to the amphitheater. Resh Laqish, one of the most famous *amoraim* of Palestine in the third century CE, was a gladiator before entering the world of the *bet midrash*.⁵⁷ A discussion regarding

the redemption of one who has sold himself to a non-Jew more than once in order to earn a living concludes as follows: “if he sold himself to gladiators even once, he is not to be redeemed.”⁵⁸ This law simply notes the fact that there were Jews who sold themselves to non-Jews as gladiators for financial reasons. R. Abbahu’s decision to redeem a Jew who sold himself to a gladiator training school, and R. Ami’s refusal to do so, corroborate this phenomenon.

The economic crisis that hit the Roman Empire in the mid-third century CE, evident in ancient Palestine as well, forced certain people to take part in gladiatorial combats for large sums of money. Resh Laqish said: “If you were to sell yourself to *ludii*, then you would sell yourself at a high price.”⁵⁹ Searching for sources of income at times of crisis, together



FIGURE 5.2 Beth Shearim, incised graffito from Catacomb 4 depicting a gladiatorial fight. *On right: retiarius; on left: myrmillo covered by a net thrown over him by his adversary* (courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society, following Benjamin Mazar, *Beth She'arim: Report on the Excavations during 1936–1940*, vol. 1: *Catacombs 1–4* [New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1973] pl. 63:3).

with the desire to gain fame with no direct connection to the legal or social status of a specific individual, led many, including the Jews, to participate in gladiatorial combats and animal baiting in the local arena.⁶⁰ One can assume that some Jewish gladiators who were killed while fighting in the arena of amphitheaters in ancient Palestine were buried in their homeland. An incised graffito describing a gladiatorial battle between two figures, a *myrmillo* and a *retiarius*, was found on the wall of Catacomb 4 in Bet She'arim, the cemetery of a Jewish town in the western Lower Galilee (Figure 5.2). Similar engravings were found in a Jewish burial tomb at Tel Itun in Judaea (Figure 3.10).⁶¹ The engravings clearly indicate that the death of the deceased is a direct consequence of his participation in gladiatorial games. A family member who accompanied this gladiator to his final resting place recorded his story on the wall of his burial tomb.

Jews residing in the Diaspora also participated in the games held in most Mediterranean cities. Flavius Josephus tells us that in his travels to Rome he met in Puteoli (Italy) one Aliturus, "an actor who was a special favorite of Nero and of Jewish origin." Martial mentions one Menophilus, a Jewish mime whom he met in the baths.⁶² In the first century CE, Jewish athletes were forbidden to participate in competitions in Alexandria.⁶³ In Cyrene, Jews appeared in gladiatorial combats and animal-baiting events during the years of the Jewish revolt under Trajan.⁶⁴

The Performances, Competitions, and Games as a Parable in Rabbinic Sermons

In light of the many expressions of rabbinic protest against the various forms of public entertainment mentioned above, one story stands out as exhibiting a positive attitude toward mime, a particularly popular type of performance in the imperial theater. Genesis Rabbah recounts that Resh Laqish came to mollify the Patriarch following some criticism voiced against him by Yosi in the synagogue of Ma'on. He said: "We ought to be grateful to the nations of the world who bring the mimes into their theaters and circuses and are entertained by them, so that they

would not have to sit and converse with one another. Yet Yose of Ma'on spoke words of Torah and you became angry with him!"⁶⁵ Mime, according to Resh Laqish, had positive qualities. On the one hand, it served as a voice for the citizens vis-à-vis the ruling power (i.e., the nations of the world = the Romans), using ridicule, laughter, and satire as its ploy; on the other, the rulers and upper class were comfortable with this, since mime played a calming role, preventing the populace from having seditious conversations and from performing rebellious acts. Therefore, Resh Laqish solicits the Patriarch and asks why one should care about Yosi of Ma'on's statement and why he is angry. In his opinion, the criticism in and of itself is not a bad thing.⁶⁶ On the contrary, we should value the fact that the Roman people brought mime into their theaters and provided the populace with an almost uninterrupted platform to air their views. Since this does not harm them, so you (the Patriarch) should also forgive Yosi of Ma'on despite his sermon in the synagogue. Resh Laqish's positive approach is unique in rabbinic literature, but judging by the rabbis' sermons founded on motifs borrowed from the very performances, competitions, and games commonly held in Roman Palestine (see below), it seems that this attitude was perhaps more prevalent among the rabbinic class, even if not explicitly voiced.

Thus, rabbinic responses representing primarily the tannaitic vs. amoraic socio-environmental milieux seem to reflect how the Jewish community's behavior evolved over time. The *tannaim* who dealt with issues regarding Roman public entertainment resided primarily in rural areas—except for R. Yosi ben R. Halafta, who lived in Sepphoris. In contrast, most of the *amoraim* who dealt with similar matters hailed from cities—Tiberias, Sepphoris, Lod, and Caesarea.⁶⁷ The Jews and rabbis who dwelled in the cities in the second through fourth centuries CE were exposed to urban life and the prevailing cultural habits. Watching the Roman performances constituted a significant change in Jewish society, and the rabbis who objected to them clearly voiced their opinions. However, with time, they, too, were influenced by their surroundings, culling ideas from the various forms of entertainment and incorporating them into their sermons and talmudic discourses.

In the third and fourth centuries CE, we find that many rabbis used parables and terminology taken from the world of public spectacles to clarify a certain issue or explain a difficult word in the Bible, a verse, or a particular lesson to be learned from a biblical story. The evidence embedded in rabbinic literature is varied and, as discussed in earlier chapters, also contributes immensely to the study of Roman games and spectacles in ancient Palestine. Some sources imply the physical appearance of those buildings, whereas most of them refer to the performances and their terminology as well as the portrayal of the participants or the audience. The rabbis had no intention of either imparting any information about the buildings for public entertainment or of giving testimony about the activity in them; rather, they chose the details that were germane to building their sermons and thus casually interjected information at their own discretion. I will illustrate this with several relevant examples.

The theater, unlike the hippodrome and the amphitheater, was perceived by the rabbis as one of the most important buildings incorporated into the urban matrix, along with other public structures. This emerges from the parable of the slave, “to whom his master said: Wait for me in the marketplace, without specifying the spot,” which expounds Psalm 104:8: “Mountains rising, valleys sinking—to the place You established for them.” The slave, who did not understand his master’s intention, deliberated with himself and said: “Perhaps he wanted me to wait for him near the basilica or near the bathhouse or near the theater.” When he found him, his master slapped his face, saying: “I sent you to the entrance of the governor’s residence.”⁶⁸ Whoever composed this parable was well acquainted with the layout of the ancient Palestinian city, in which the theater and other public buildings were located in the civic center, and he even knew that it served as a landmark or meeting place in everyday life.⁶⁹

Those who did not attend the shows or did not manage to get a seat at one of the performances remained at home or roamed the streets during the festivities, experiencing an atmosphere in the city that differed from that of everyday life. According to R. Ḥanan, stealing fruit of the

sabbatical year in first-century Caesarea was made possible when “the gentiles went to their circuses and left the marketplace full of fruit, and the Jews came and pillaged the merchandise.”⁷⁰ A similar situation prompted R. Nehemiah to explain, albeit anachronistically, how it was that Joseph remained alone at home with Potiphar’s wife: “It was a theater day, and everyone went to see [the performance], but he went home to tally his master’s accounts.” It is thus not insignificant that R. Nehemiah uses the term “theater day.”⁷¹ This was not just an ordinary weekday, when people or slaves were busy with housework, but rather a special occasion, a day when performances were held in the theater and everyone in the household went to see them. Joseph, however, for whom this culture was foreign, did not attend the shows and therefore remained alone at home. R. Nehemiah’s words reflect a prevalent practice whereby performances were held throughout the day and sometimes even for several consecutive days. The streets on those days were suddenly empty, no one remained at home, and some of the shops in the marketplace were closed. This is recurrent description for a similar day in Rome, when the city’s inhabitants went to the circus.⁷²

For the rabbis, the colorful performances served primarily as a source of inspiration for their sermons. In three examples, one devoted to the theater, a second to the amphitheater, and a third to the hippodrome, it will be demonstrated how the rabbis were found to be well aware of details that they intelligently wove into their parables. One of R. Abba bar Kahana’s sermons is founded on pantomime, a well-known type of performance in his day: “It is written, ‘And David returned to bless his household, and Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David’ (2 Sam. 6:20). What is the meaning of ‘one of the riffraff’? R. Abba bar Kahana said: ‘The lowest of the most lowly is the *orchēstēs* (dancer).’”⁷³ The sermon explains the expression *כְּאַחַד הָרִיקִים* “as one of the riffraff,” but in order to understand it one needs to revert to the account in 2 Samuel 6:12–23, wherein David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem in a procession filled with joy and accompanied by cheers and blasts of the horn. The king, wearing only a cloth shirt, pranced and leaped in front of the ark before all the House of Israel. When his wife

Michal learned of his behavior, she derisively snickered, but when he came home she chided him: “Didn’t the king of Israel do himself honor today, exposing himself in the sight of the slave girls of his subjects, as one of the riffraff might expose himself!” In this light, it now becomes clear how and why R. Abba bar Kahana reached his proposed interpretation. In explaining Michal’s statement “as one of the riffraff,” the rabbi made an analogy between David’s act and the *orchēstēs*, the classical term used in the Greek-speaking world. R. Abba bar Kahana’s choice of words was based not only on the alliterative resemblance between the Hebrew רִיפְרָף (riffraff) and רִקְדָן (dancer), but also fit in well with the entire biblical story.⁷⁴ By wishing to emphasize the severity of Michal’s contempt for the king for having pranced and whirled in front of the Ark of God and the people, R. Abba bar Kahana compared him to a lowly *orchēstēs*, a pantomimist who danced for the pleasure of his spectators in the theater. He performed alone onstage, wearing a simple garment and playing all the roles performed in the pantomime while musicians accompanied him in his dance. The analogy between David’s act and the performance of the pantomimist in the theater is precise and seems to justify calling David an *orchēstēs*. The comparison between the two figures does not refer only to the act of dancing, but also lies in the inferior status of the stage actor in Roman society generally and among the Jews in particular. Instead of behaving as would befit a king, David, Michal intimates, turned himself into an *orchēstēs*, one of the contemptible people found at the bottom of the social ladder. R. Abba bar Kahana’s distinction illustrates well Michal’s criticism of King David, and it is clear that only someone familiar with pantomime could make this connection between the two and completely understand the sermon.⁷⁵

Another sermon portrays the inherent danger in the very popular Roman gladiatorial combats. R. Aḥa, a third-century *amora* living in Caesarea, uses the *realia* known in his city to explain the verse “In a time of good fortune, enjoy the good fortune” (Eccles. 7:14). “R. Aḥa said: When the Judgment Day arrives . . . you will be among those who behold the punishment of the sinners rather than among those who are beheld receiving punishment. You will be among the spectators rather

than among the gladiators, you will be among those about whom it is written, ‘they shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of men who have rebelled . . .’ (Isa. 66:24) and not among those about whom it is written, ‘their worm shall not die’ (ibid.).”⁷⁶ It is preferable to be among the spectators in the amphitheater than to actually participate and risk meeting your death in a gladiatorial performance, says R. Aḥa. In this way, your good deeds in this world will credit you in the world to come—putting you on the right side, from where you will be able to view the punishments of the sinners rather than be the object of punishment. This parable, the origin of which Saul Lieberman found in a Greek proverb,⁷⁷ conforms well with R. Aḥa’s sermon dealing with the world to come, but it also demonstrates the danger of the public spectacles performed in the amphitheater, of which the spectators as well as the gladiators in Caesarea were well aware.

A sermon attributed to the fourth-century CE Palestinian *amora* R. Abin, which deals with the chariot races held in the hippodrome, is considered one of the most complex homilies in rabbinic literature using such analogous themes. In it R. Abin compares the victory of a charioteer in the hippodrome being awarded a palm branch to the waving of the *lulav* (palm branch) on the Feast of Tabernacles, which serves as an expression of victory in man’s judgment before God:

What kind of victory is meant by the phrase “in thy right hand there are pleasures of victory” (Ps. 16:11)? That kind in which the victor receives a palm branch. For according to the custom of the world, when two *heniochi* (charioteers) race in the hippodrome, which of them receives the palm branch? The victor. . . . (A) So, on Rosh Hashanah all the people of the world come forth like contestants on parade and pass before God, and the children of Israel among all the people of the world also pass before Him. . . . But actually no one knows who was victorious, whether the children of Israel or the nations of the world. (B) Rosh Hashanah is over, and all the children of Israel come forth on Yom Kippur and fast, and they wear their best white clothing. But even after Yom Kippur has passed, still no one knows who was victorious, the children of Israel or the nations of the world. (C) When the first day of Sukkot arrives, and all the chil-

dren of Israel, young and old, hold their *lulavim* in their right hand and their *ethrogim* in their left, then immediately everyone knows that the children of Israel are proclaimed victorious.⁷⁸

In his sermon, R. Abin describes the trial between the nations of the world and the children of Israel on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. He explains this by describing three different episodes in the hippodrome that are revealed only with the unfolding of the events in the sermon. The spectators at the races gathered in the hippodrome before the start of the competition. They spent their time chatting and rooting for the victory of a specific chariot, not knowing, of course, the outcome of the race (A). In the second stage of the sermon, during the race itself, when the air is highly charged with tension, we do not yet know who the winner is. Such was also the case on Yom Kippur: the moment of anxiety and expectation occupy the world; man has not yet been given his judgment (B). Only in the third “leg” of the sermon, when the winning charioteer is crowned and he is awarded the palm branch, will the winner be known (C).⁷⁹

The corresponding details in R. Abin’s sermon, founded on familiarity with the hippodrome in Roman and late antique Palestine, are interesting and important to our understanding of the climate that prevailed during the races in our region. The analogy between the two scenarios illustrates and explains the development of events, and especially the moment of crowning the winner with the date palm.⁸⁰ Just as the victor of the chariot race or athletic competition was crowned with a date palm, which he held in his hand and showed off to all the spectators in the hippodrome, so, too, the Jews go out on the festival of Sukkot with the *lulav* in their hands to show everyone that they are the victors in the trial of the nations of the world (Figure 5.3). This detail is the focus of the message in R. Abin’s sermon, through which he wished to explain the meaning of the verse “Delights are forever in your right hand” (Ps. 16:11).

The use of elements taken from the sphere of public entertainment characterizes not only the sermons delivered before an audience, possibly in the synagogue, but also a technique used by rabbis for talmudic study



FIGURE 5.3 Piazza Armerina, portrayal of a victorious charioteer in his chariot, proceeding to receive the prize of a date palm (courtesy of Elżbieta Jastrzębowska, Institute of Archaeology University of Warsaw).

in the *bet midrash*. The choice of these elements most probably contributed to the academic discourse and therefore the rabbis saw nothing wrong in using them. In their discussion regarding the prohibition of drinking water that was left uncovered, Resh Laqish, for one, makes the following claim: “If you were to sell yourself to *ludii*, then you would sell yourself at a high price, but here you are selling yourself for a low price.”⁸¹ Wishing to prevent people from hurting themselves, Resh Laqish considers this act absurd; drinking uncovered water, he maintains, is a more reckless act than selling oneself to the *ludii*, for at least in the latter case one receives a sum of money, while the drinker takes the risk of sipping the uncovered water he bought at a very low price.⁸²

Regarding the question whether a woman can become betrothed by an act that causes her direct pleasure without receiving a sum of money, one rabbi uses the following tannaitic source to prove his point: “It was

taught: [If a woman says,] ‘Sit with me as a companion, and I will become betrothed unto thee’ . . . ‘dance before me,’ ‘do as was done in this public game [*dromos*],’ we assess it: if it is worth a *perutah* (a small coin), she is betrothed; if not, she is not betrothed.”⁸³ The woman agreed to marry on the condition that her husband-to-be run ahead of her, just like the athlete runs on the course in the *dromos* (stadium).⁸⁴ The excerpt before us assesses whether this is an act worthy of a sum of money, and, if so, she is betrothed. It is not the final outcome that is important here, but rather the analogy the rabbi used to reach his conclusion. Instead of speaking at length, he chose a term well known to him and his discussants.

In a talmudic discussion dealing with an agreement for the sale of land, which seems to have been sold without the seller explicitly specifying that part of the plot of land consists of rocky soil, R. Jeremiah demonstrates a case using his knowledge of the stadium. The rabbis who deliberated on this question examined the plan of the unfit plot of land, as well as its size in relation to the whole tract. At the end of the discussion, R. Jeremiah cites a series of other cases in which a plot of land was unsuitable for cultivation, ultimately reaching an ambiguous decision: “What is like a ring, like a straight line, in the shape of a stadium or in that of a crooked road? The matter is undecided.”⁸⁵ To illustrate his predicament, R. Jeremiah used actual models familiar to him and the rest of the participants in the deliberations; thus, as far as he was concerned, the term “stadium” in his question was a code understood by all.

The examples discussed here, and others like them scattered throughout rabbinic literature, clearly inform us that the rabbis did not avoid incorporating such content in their sermons and halakhic discussions. The assortment of themes that served as a source of inspiration for the rabbis is not vague, casual, or insignificant, and certainly not fabricated; rather, it was founded on a reality known to them and the members of their community. This was an intentional choice, with attention given to detail and meant to illustrate clearly the subject of the sermon or halakhic discourse. Why were the rabbis forced to use terminology relating to a culture to which they were diametrically opposed? Likewise, it is

paradoxical that certain rabbis, like R. Abba bar Kahana, objected to attending public spectacles but at the same time used terminology and examples from the very world of entertainment that he condemned in his sermons.⁸⁶

These sources, whose nature should not be doubted or considered coincidental, are a clear and sharp reflection of the process by which Jewish society was exposed to the Roman culture of the first centuries CE. Although the rabbis tried to persuade their communities to refrain from attending public spectacles, the Jewish population of ancient Palestine did not heed them and was therefore very familiar with the performances held in the theaters, hippodromes, and amphitheaters. Knowing that the games were not foreign to the people, the rabbis had hoped that by using such terms of reference they would bring their message and way of life closer to the members of their communities. It was an intentional decision made by the rabbis, even if it contradicted their basic worldview. If Jews had not attended the Roman buildings for public entertainment and had not been familiar with the various forms of activities held in them, the rabbis would have had no reason to use terminology related to this alien world. The increased use of phrases borrowed from Roman public spectacles is an indication of the cultural exposure of the Jewish community, rabbinical leaders included, to these public events. An analysis of the various texts clearly demonstrates that the rabbis acted within the acceptable sociocultural of their times, one in which they were often forced to make compromises.

It thus becomes clear that there were rabbis who had a working knowledge, some less and some more, about Roman public performances and used it in their sermons and talmudic study. Nevertheless, it is difficult to know with certainty how the rabbis acquired this knowledge, whether from attending the performances themselves or indirectly, from a third party. The first possibility indeed seems far-fetched and weak, but might be alluded to in R. Abba bar Kahana's sermon, noted above, in which he criticized the Roman spectacle and concluded: "Of joy. What good is that?" (Eccles. 2:2). That is, what point would there be in the attendance of the disciples of the rabbis at theaters and circuses?"⁸⁷ R. Abba bar

Kahana not only questioned what rabbis were doing at the games—although he was fully aware that some people, even those of his own circle, frequented games and spectacles—but also made it patently clear that the rabbis, who in certain cases considered themselves educators or spiritual leaders, were expected not to attend or participate in the Roman games. It is also possible that the sermon was merely a criticism of the prevalent reality wherein certain rabbis or their disciples could not resist the temptation of attending the games and spectacles. In a similar vein, Socrates Scholasticus, in the early fifth century, mentions that members of Bishop Cyril of Alexandria's circle attended the local theater to learn about the regulations regarding theater performances, even though Christian clergy generally avoided attending Roman public spectacles.⁸⁸ The fact that rabbis lived in the Galilean cities, and certainly in mixed cities suffused with Graeco-Roman culture, inevitably led them to have an intimate knowledge of the various performances. These rabbis, in turn, infused their sermons with what they either witnessed with their own eyes or heard in their hometowns without ever visiting those places they considered anathema.

Rabbis, Church Fathers, and Roman Leisure Culture

The Christian community of the first centuries CE experienced a similar phenomenon. Church fathers, like their Jewish counterparts, viewed Roman public entertainment as a negative phenomenon, objecting to it on moral and religious grounds and equating the ritual of honoring the gods or the emperor at the beginning of the games with idolatry. They, too, were faced with a sociocultural reality in which members of their community attended Roman public spectacles despite objections by their spiritual leaders. The Christian rejection of ancient spectacles, according to Ruth Webb, also derived from the widespread ambivalence of the clergy to any aspect related to theatrical shows in general, as well as from the tension and competition between the two institutions.⁸⁹

Shortly before 200 CE, Tertullian, in Carthage, provides the earliest extant evidence for Christian criticism of Roman public spectacles. The

procession at the beginning of the games, during which an idol is carried and sacrifices are offered in its honor, is a clear indication of the connection between the games and idolatry,⁹⁰ and it is for this reason that the church fathers decided it was improper for a Christian believer to attend such performances. The immoral character of the games was a decisive factor in the church fathers' attempt to dissuade the members of their communities from attending such public events.⁹¹ In his *Mystagogical Cathecheses* from the mid-fourth century CE, Cyril of Jerusalem instructed those who were to be baptized into Christianity to reject the pomp of the devil, which, he believed, was embodied in "the madness of the shows (in the theater), the horse races (in the hippodrome), and hunting battles (in the amphitheater), and all such vanity from which the devout holy man was to be delivered."⁹² Furthermore, in a sermon devoted entirely to this subject, John Chrysostom, one of the most prominent church rhetors in Antioch, made astonishing remarks condemning the games.⁹³ Elsewhere he maintained that the games did not do bodily harm to man, but were damaging to the soul.⁹⁴ "Always rejoice in the Lord," Chrysostom says, "but not in the games, which are the way of Satan."⁹⁵ Jacob of Serugh, born in Kurtan on the Euphrates, condemned the mime circa 500 CE in one of his comments: "[it] is a sport which introduces paganism by means of lying stories, an inciter to hateful deeds by reason of these its licentious gestures."⁹⁶

Early Christianity perceived these performances as a manifestation of the evil forces and the ambassadors of Satan who dwelled in cities and with whom the Christian was to struggle on a daily basis. The "unconscious manipulation by some invisible malign power," as formulated by Peter Brown, was what the church fathers tried to avert by their admonition.⁹⁷ The church fathers' preoccupation with public entertainment, and their multiple references to related issues throughout this period, in all probability attest to an opposite trend in the Christian community. Like the Jewish community, the Christian populace did not pay heed to the message emphasized in the sermons and the written word. Cyril of Jerusalem's statement, mentioned earlier, hints indirectly at the reality in fourth-century CE Palestine, as does Choricus of Gaza's sixth-century

CE oration, *Apologia Mimorum*, wherein he remarks that the public spectacles enchanted the Christian community. Going against the wishes of their spiritual leaders, they and their fellow citizens regularly attended events held in the buildings designated for public entertainment.⁹⁸ Sometimes they preferred to attend the performances on Sundays instead of going to church, as the Jews did on their Sabbath. When shows were conducted in the theater or hippodrome, the preacher, being aware of the smaller number of congregants in attendance in the church, referred to this situation in his sermon.⁹⁹ The church fathers who wished to suppress this phenomenon, even with the help of imperial legislation, spoke to their congregants through their sermons, as did the rabbis in their attempt to dissuade Jews from attending the games.¹⁰⁰

The church fathers' prohibition resembles that of the rabbis, at times basing their reasons on verses from the Bible, or using ideas similar to those of the rabbis. Nowhere does the Bible explicitly forbid attending the circus or theater, or watching combats or shows, says Tertullian, "but we find relevant to this type of thing that first word of David: 'Happy is the man,' he says 'who has not gone to the gathering of the impious, who has not stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of pestilences (Ps. 1:1).'"¹⁰¹ Such an explanation is also found in R. Meir's sermon expounding the same verse: "What does it mean, 'And in the seat of scoffers he will not sit'? These are the theaters and circuses of the gentiles."¹⁰² Elsewhere Tertullian enumerates several body parts that God gave to man—the eye, the tongue, the hands, and the legs—with which he is to behave well or badly. Man, continues Tertullian, should then use his organs according to God's will and refrain from watching performances repugnant to God.¹⁰³ Similarly, R. Levi of the third century CE enumerates man's organs with which he chooses between good and bad, saying: "With his feet he can go to the theaters and circuses, while if he wishes he can go to synagogues and houses of study."¹⁰⁴ John Chrysostom praises the reading of holy scriptures and suggests to those who doubt them to examine for themselves what is more beneficial—listening to Psalm hymns in church or listening to satanic songs in the theater, and, alternatively, how the performance is conducted when sitting

in church as opposed to the spectacles in the theater.¹⁰⁵ Such a dichotomy is found in one talmudic sermon, mentioned above, which contrasts the lighthearted and hypocritical activity in the theater and circus with the real joy derived from prayer and synagogue ritual.¹⁰⁶

The church fathers, like the rabbis, did not easily succeed in changing the balance of reality. They continued to denounce Roman public entertainment and, like the rabbis, incorporated symbols, motifs, and ideas borrowed from that very culture into their sermons. According to Blake Leyerle, John Chrysostom protested against the distancing effect of the theater on his congregation, but, she argues, he knew “that drama can be an able teacher.”¹⁰⁷ In this way the church fathers hoped to elucidate the tenets of their faith while contrasting them with the falsity of Roman public games.¹⁰⁸

The New Testament contains several examples from the arena, but it seems that the church fathers in both the East and West incorporated in their sermons metaphors taken from the performances and competitions of their day. Paul, for one, encouraged people to follow in the path of Jesus and to enjoy his message, and used a metaphor known from the stadium: “Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it” (1 Cor. 9:24–27).¹⁰⁹ The struggles of several biblical figures are likened by the church fathers to contestants in the Roman arena; Job, for one, is often compared to a wrestler fighting for his life.¹¹⁰ Tertullian equates the mission of the Christian with the competitions conducted in the Roman circus: “Count of these as your circus games,” he says, “fix your eyes on the courses of the world, the gliding seasons, reckon up the periods of time, long for the goal of the final consummation, defend the societies of the churches, be startled at God’s signal, be roused up at the angel’s trump, glory in the palms of martyrdom.”¹¹¹ Origen enumerates the obligations imposed on the Christian believer in this world and the expectation that he would accomplish them. He compares the actions of man to the behavior of the actor in the theater who “is under obligation to say certain things and do certain things in the sight of the spectators and if

he fails to carry out this obligation is punished as having insulted the whole audience.” He then concludes that Christian believers, like the former, “have obligations to the whole world and all the angels and the whole human race.”¹¹²

Jerome uses athletic competitions as a metaphor for explaining Psalm 129:3: “Plowmen plowed across my back.”¹¹³ Elsewhere he likens man’s sins in the world to theater masks that the actor changes during a show, saying that the sinner looks as if he is covered by a mask just as “the same actor now figures as a brawny Hercules, and now relaxes into the softness of a Venus or the quivering tone of a Cybele, so we who, if we were not of the world, would be hated by the world, have a counterfeit mask for every sin to which we are inclined.”¹¹⁴ John Chrysostom explains the role of God who judges between the Christian believer and the devil, while illuminating his sermon with a description of events in the Olympic combats. The Olympic judge stands there “impartially aloof from the combatants, favoring neither the one nor the other, but awaiting the outcome. He stands in the middle because his judge is imperial. But in our combats with the devil, Christ does not stand aloof but is wholly on our side.”¹¹⁵

The attitudes of the Jewish and Christian communities of late antiquity toward Roman public entertainment indicate similar behavioral patterns. They underscore the existence of a gap between the sermons of both religious leaderships, which view the games and spectacles as religiously and morally reprehensible, and the cultural behavior of their congregants; the religious leaders’ position, however, did not deter individuals in either community from attending such activities. The reality whereby members of the two communities attended the Roman games on a regular basis is what eventually took hold, and in the course of time, the rabbis, like the church fathers, internalized this sociocultural phenomenon despite their objection to it. That both monotheistic communities underwent identical processes, even though their leaders preached and upheld a religious way of life, only confirms the attitude of Jewish society toward Roman leisure culture, which many residents of the cities of Roman Palestine considered a source of pride.

The fondness for Roman performances in late antiquity and the streaming of the masses to them—often in disregard of their religious leaders—do not reflect a belief in pagan gods and their mythological stories. The inhabitants of the cities in the East preferred to go to the theater and circus regularly simply to be entertained. The buildings that continued to function in late antique Palestine and the performances held in them, as well as the question of who attended them, will be discussed in the next and final chapter. It will also examine when the various shows that once characterized the vibrant cultural life of every city in the region came to an end, as well as the waning appearance of the monumental buildings that once graced the urban landscape.

6

Public Spectacles and Sociocultural Behavior in Late Antique Palestine

THE LOCAL POPULATION of late antique Palestine had largely assimilated the cultural habits of the empire, including the popular Roman spectacles. The urban authorities were keen to satisfy the growing demand of their fellow citizens for such shows and consequently constructed buildings for mass entertainment in their cities. With the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity by the fourth century CE, Byzantine society's attitude toward public entertainment gradually changed, influencing the extent and nature of the shows. The glamour of the Roman competitions under the supervision of gods and Caesars waned, making way for performances now intended for pure entertainment and no longer associated with pagan festivals. Some of the Roman cultural events nevertheless continued throughout the latter period, despite the growing tension between the church and the desire of the masses for public entertainment; these leisure activities responded to their desideratum for pure *divertissement*, as well as to the elite—the late antique Hellenists—who wished to maintain a connection with their past.¹

The Christian emperors recognized the need for providing public entertainment, yet several laws issued in the fourth through sixth centuries were clearly meant to reduce, restrict, and even eliminate it so as to

conform to Christian dogma. One law from 425 CE, directed at all Christians (as well as pagans and Jews), forbade “all amusements of the theaters and circuses” in all cities on Sundays and feast days. Such imperial legislation was created presumably to remove distractions that would dissuade Christians from attending church on those holy days.² The need for repeated legislation and the reinforcement of old laws testifies, albeit indirectly, to the popularity and appeal of the various forms of entertainment that took place in late antiquity despite church opposition.³ Compared to the Roman era, public performances were now less evident, and the growing attack of Christian preachers, among other reasons, led to their eventual disappearance.

This chapter will focus on the final phase of this cultural phenomenon in ancient Palestine, when some performances were banned by decree and others were fiercely attacked by the Christian church and its spokesmen. It will begin with the presentation of the evidence pertaining to public entertainment in late antique Palestine and will be followed by the later configuration of mass-entertainment structures in the region until they ceased to be used sometime in the sixth century CE. In order to gain a better understanding of the processes that took place in the region throughout the period, and for the sake of comparison, the discussion here, too, will include the plethora of finds uncovered in the cities of the Decapolis and Arabia. An assessment will then be made of the types of performances that were, in fact, held in this era, and will be followed by a discussion of the reasons that led to the cancellation of shows at the end of this period.

Evidence for Public Performance in Late Antique Palestine

The new *Zeitgeist* in the empire after the conversion to Christianity slowly affected all facets of the populace’s daily life and cultural behavior. In 325 CE, Constantine brought an end to the practice of *damnatio ad ludum*, an act that likely affected the number of gladiatorial shows conducted during the fourth century CE.⁴ In the Roman East, these shows seem to have occurred less and less frequently in the course of the

fourth century and were banned entirely after the reign of Arcadius.⁵ Athletic competitions were also ruled out by the early fifth century, though various contests were sporadically held in some locales.⁶ The games lost their international renown, and competitions became mere spectacles mixed with other shows. In the fifth and sixth centuries, the repertoire of performances included theatrical shows, acrobatic exercises, chariot races, and wild beast hunts in the arena (*venationes*), but their frequency diminished over time throughout the empire.⁷

The situation in late antique Palestine was not much different. The relevant sources, mainly literary, attest to the existence and nature of various performances in some cities in the fourth century. Their number decreased and gradually tapered off toward the end of the period to only a few locations. Changes in the quality and quantity of the sources reflect not only a general decline in the number of shows in the region, but also a growing opposition to public entertainment in late antique society.

Such was the case, for example, in late antique Caesarea, the capital of the province. In the fourth century CE, the city boasted fine charioteers and races, and was praised for its pantomime.⁸ Several performances were held in Eusebius's day, some of which occurred during Maximinus's visit to the city.⁹ Chariot races were held in the hippodrome; pantomime, mime, and performances involving the recitation of speeches and listening to "new and strange songs and music" were staged in the theater; condemned Christians were executed in the local stadium, most likely the monumental amphitheater constructed there in Hadrian's day.¹⁰ A school for exercise and training gladiators (*ludus*), headed by a *procurator ludorum* and funded by the imperial treasury, functioned in Eusebius's Caesarea.¹¹ Animals were brought to the city in the fourth century from India, Ethiopia, and elsewhere, and it has been suggested that one scene on the Caesarea cup announces their arrival in the city for the *venationes* held in the local arena.¹²

Evidence for public shows in fifth- and sixth-century Caesarea is meager compared to what is available for the fourth-century city. Justas, the leader of the Samaritan revolt in 484 CE, held chariot races in the city.¹³

In the following century, special officials (*hippotrophoi*) were responsible for maintaining the stables and distributing an annual sum of 5,629¼ solidi from imperial funds among the various factions competing in the city's chariot races.¹⁴ According to Choricus, mime performances were held in his day in Caesarea's theater; the city's actors and rhetors presented mime plays, presumably in the theater of nearby Shuni-Maiumas, during an annual festival organized by inhabitants of their hometown and in the presence of the local governor.¹⁵

Gaza, a stronghold of paganism in late antique Palestine and the hometown of many sophists, maintained a long-standing cultural tradition throughout antiquity.¹⁶ Despite the Christianization of the late antique city, the intellectual atmosphere in Gaza, its cosmopolitan nature, and the local population's affection for the Hellenistic heritage explain why at least some of the public performances in the city were popular and lasted longer. Some sources attest to shows in Gaza in the fourth and early fifth centuries. The city gained renown at this time for its excellent *pammacharii*,¹⁷ and Jerome remarks that the horses of one Italicus, a Christian resident of Gaza, raced against those of the local *duovir* (a city magistrate), while another charioteer who was struck in his chariot by a demon was healed by Hilarion.¹⁸

Choricus's *Apologia Mimorum* is an important source of information for the existence of various performances in the city in the first half of the sixth century.¹⁹ His oration speaks in favor of mime and emphasizes its importance to man's education. Above all, he notes, mime satisfies the audience, having a calming effect on the crowds between races, relieving them from the stress, discord, and hardship of everyday life.²⁰ Elsewhere Choricus refers to dancing as well as musical and choral shows, regarding them as tasteless and vulgar.²¹ Procopius of Gaza, Choricus's teacher, opposed pantomime, identifying the licentious nature of the dancers as a direct cause of civic strife.²²

Choricus does not speak favorably about the chariot races held in Gaza.²³ They ran all day long and were interspersed with a diverse program provided by the city that included mime, pantomime, music, and acrobatics. Procopius of Gaza praised the governor for granting a sub-

vention to run the horse races and festival.²⁴ In one monody attributed to him, Procopius refers to a youth from a noble family in the city who was not drawn to the excitement of the hippodrome, the joy of the theater, or the game of draughts (a Roman board game similar to checkers). As an adult, however, this anonymous figure glorified the city with funds to conduct the very races he deplored, and although the races showered the city with victory, garlands, and fame, this devoted Christian wanted nothing to do with the performances themselves and even refrained from watching them.²⁵

Wild beast hunts were also held in the city alongside the other shows. Shortly after 501 CE, Procopius of Gaza praised Anastasius for banning such spectacles, in which unfortunate men were forced to fight wild animals.²⁶ However, as elsewhere, these hunts were revived in Gaza in Choricus's time, indicating that Anastasius's decree was not fully implemented.²⁷

The correspondence of Barsanuphius and John, two monks who were active in a monastery in the Gaza region between the third and fifth decades of the sixth century, reveals the church's struggle against public performances held in Gaza. One letter notes Barsanuphius speaking out against a local magistrate who acted contrary to the church's directive forbidding participation in public performances; another refers to an influential citizen then living in Constantinople who made great efforts to organize theatrical shows.²⁸ Elsewhere, Barsanuphius uses the chariot races in the hippodrome and the contestants' efforts to win the race as a metaphor in a responsum concerning inappropriate religious behavior.²⁹ For our present purposes, it is irrelevant whether he saw the race in person or was using a secondhand report. Utilizing the hippodrome's scene metaphorically suggests that both Barsanuphius and the person who addressed the question to him were acquainted with the races, which apparently were common in their day.

The crowd's behavior during performances in Gaza is further illuminated by several Christian spokesmen. Jerome, who describes the race in Gaza mentioned earlier, indicates that the crowd in the hippodrome was ecstatic even before the starting gates were opened. After the signal

was given and the chariots began moving, the shouts of the crowd swelled and the heathens cried in unison: “Marnas victus est a Christo”—Marnas is conquered by Christ.³⁰ Sozomen, who describes the martyrdom of Saints Eusebius, Nestabus, and Zeno, tells of Gazaeans who gathered in the theater and cried out against these saints, declaring “that they had committed sacrilege in their temple and had used the past as an opportunity for the injury and insult of paganism.”³¹

Performances were conducted in other cities of late antique Palestine as well. The scattered sources pertaining to these locales provide only meager information about each show but sometimes underscore, even indirectly, their existence at a certain time or place. Ascalon, Gaza’s northern neighbor, was known for its fine wrestlers in the fourth century,³² and an outstanding charioteer from Ascalon, who presumably gained experience in the hippodrome of his hometown, competed in Constantinople, where he achieved great fame before his death.³³ Gladiatorial combats presumably were held in Scythopolis in the mid-fourth century by one Paulus, “skilled in the work of bloodshed . . . just as a trainer (*lanista*) of gladiators,” who was sent to investigate and punish those suspected of high treason.³⁴ Julianus ben Sabar, the leader of the Samaritan revolt in 529, organized chariot races in Neapolis and also presided at these events. The Christian charioteer Nicias won the race against the Jews and Samaritans and was beheaded immediately thereafter in the hippodrome by order of Julianus.³⁵

The names of four performers were incised on marble slabs in Hall E at Ḥammāt Gader; three of them played different roles in the late antique pantomime, and the fourth was a juggler (Figure 3.2). It has been suggested that the four figures were professional performers in the service of the visitors to Ḥammāt Gader, but one could equally argue that they also performed in the nearby theaters in Gadara and elsewhere.³⁶ A curse tablet found in Fiq (ancient Apheca), a small village in the vicinity of Hippos (Sussita), mentions Hyperchios, a bewigged pantomime of the Blues faction. It was composed in the fourth century or even later by a dancer of a rival troupe who was determined to ensure that Hyperchios

would not win the contest.³⁷ There is no way of knowing where the two pantomimes performed, perhaps in Hippos or in one of the cities near the Sea of Galilee. Domninus, a charioteer who competed in Caesarea's eastern hippodrome in the fourth or fifth century, wished to win the race by putting a curse on his unnamed rival. He or his accomplices had a curse tablet made on which the demons were asked to sabotage his rival's performance by preventing him from making the turn around the *meta* (turning post).³⁸ At Birketein, north of Gerasa in the Decapolis, an inscription dated to 535 records the celebration of the Maiuma festival there for several successive years, either in the theater or, what seems more likely, in the nearby pool.³⁹

The theater is perceived in the visual medium as an integral part of the urban fabric. The depiction of Gaza and Neapolis on the Madaba map, dated to the mid-sixth century, includes a semicircular structure appearing to the right of each of these cities (Figure 6.1).⁴⁰ The location, orientation, and details of this building's architecture support its suggested identification as a theater. The map represents the Byzantine cities, their churches, and several other monuments, although the architecture depicted in each locale did not originate in the mid-sixth century. The theaters in Gaza and Neapolis, still functioning and visible in both late antique cityscapes, were incorporated faithfully into the mosaic in their actual locations.⁴¹

Mythological themes are portrayed in colorful mosaics decorating a number of buildings dated to the fifth and early sixth centuries in the Gaza region, Sepphoris (Figure 3.1), and Madaba, for example. Some of these scenes, deriving from Greek tragedy, not only reflect the cultural tastes of the affluent citizens of the various sites, but may also testify, as argued earlier (Chap. 3), to the prominent role of theatrical performances—mime and pantomime—in portraying mythological themes on the urban stage.⁴² The range of themes is diverse and demonstrates familiarity and identification with the subject matter. Despite the wealth of finds, it cannot be argued that a single depiction or assortment of figurative portrayals in one locale denotes the actual performances



FIGURE 6.1 Depiction of Gaza in the Madaba map. Note the semicircular structure in the upper left-hand corner of the mosaic (see arrow) identified as a theater (courtesy of Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, following Michele Piccirillo and Eugenio Alliata, eds., *The Madaba Map Centenary, 1897–1997: Travelling through the Byzantine Umayyad Period* [Jerusalem, 1999], 209).

staged in that same city; nor can one claim, based on the distribution of the mosaics throughout the region, how common or frequent such shows were in late antique Palestine and Arabia.

Having reviewed the literary and nonliterary testimony associated with public entertainment in late antique Palestine, we will now examine the archaeological evidence pertaining to the theaters, hippodromes, and amphitheaters, the architectural modifications made in each building, and the extent of their operation in late antiquity. Clearly, the archaeological remains provide a wide range of evidence from the entire region while the analysis of the finds complements the results drawn from the study of the literary and other sources.

The Later Configuration of Buildings for Public Entertainment

Roman public performances conformed to the cultural tastes of the masses in late antiquity as well; the shows in ancient Palestine, as elsewhere, were attuned to the spirit of the times and to changes in popular interests. Some shows were banned in the course of time, while others, mainly theatrical performances and chariot races, were very popular in late antique society and continued until the sixth century CE. Yet, although the archaeological data are for the most part consistent with the literary and nonliterary sources presented earlier, they provide an opportunity to outline more precisely, in a slightly different way from what is generally accepted, the cultural changes that transpired in our region.

Monuments for public entertainment remained prominent in most cityscapes of late antique Palestine, the Decapolis, and Arabia. No such buildings were constructed in the country after the mid-third century CE, and the same structures built in Roman times continued to function in the later period as well, at times after being partially renovated. Some locales exhibit the continued use of structures up to the sixth century, while a considerable number of buildings throughout the region were abandoned at an earlier stage and left relatively intact, as if to commemorate their past glory.⁴³ Of these abandoned buildings, some were left empty,

the interior of others was sometimes modified for different purposes, while still others were partially despoiled and their stones recycled for the construction of new monuments (Figure 6.2).⁴⁴

Unlike temples, no Roman mass-entertainment structures were intentionally destroyed or dismantled at this time—either by a local government or a ruling religious power and its adherents—as an act of elimination or rejection of a discarded culture. At times a church was constructed on top of the ruins of an earlier building or in one of its inner spaces; however, this occurred only after it was abandoned for some time and in a few cases after it was buried under heavy debris.⁴⁵ One of the vaults of the amphitheater in Caesarea, presumably used for congregating, was paved with a simple mosaic floor. A chancel screen decorated with some Jewish symbols, found nearby, may suggest that it was a small synagogue that served the Jewish community.⁴⁶

Theaters, the most common building for public entertainment in the cities of Roman Palestine, were also popular in the later period. Compared to hippodromes and amphitheaters, the excavation of theaters in our region has yielded valuable information about the buildings in the late fourth, fifth, and early sixth centuries. An analysis of the archaeological finds clearly indicates that the number of buildings for mass entertainment decreased over time, confirming that such shows gradually lost their appeal and indirectly suggesting a growing opposition to public entertainment in ancient Palestine. Theatrical performances, chariot races, and certainly animal combats or animal baiting became less and less available, and consequently fewer cities held such shows, significantly reducing the number of people in the region exposed to public entertainment. By the early sixth century, these shows were held in only a few locales, vanishing completely sometime after the mid-sixth century, when the cities of the Eastern empire fell into the hands of bishops and landowners.⁴⁷

A compilation of the archaeological data from all the buildings for public entertainment—theaters, hippodromes, and amphitheaters—clearly demonstrates their progressive decline over time throughout the region. Broadly speaking, one can recognize those cities that continued to hold public performances, what types of shows were held in them,



FIGURE 6.2 Gerasa, dyeing facilities added in one of the western chambers of the abandoned hippodrome (photo by Zeev Weiss).

and how many facilities were actually functioning in late antiquity compared to the gradual increase in the number of deserted edifices. The data below illustrate the nature of this process throughout late antiquity and the scope of the cultural transformation in the region that influenced the very core of everyday life.

The cities holding public performances in the fourth century in most cases adhered to what was known in Roman times. The theatrical performances, chariot races, and amphitheatrical shows described in Chapter 3 were conducted not only in the major cities of Caesarea, Scythopolis, and Gaza, but also in a fairly large number of cities throughout the region. Culturally speaking, changes in public entertainment had already begun to surface locally in this period, but it is not clear what caused this shift in attitude in ancient Palestine. Should it be attributed to the conversion of the empire to Christianity, to the influence of the imperial legislation's ban of some shows and competitions, or, what seems more plausible, to the massive earthquake of 363 CE that struck a considerable number of buildings throughout the region?

Whether only one or all of these factors were responsible for the change in our region, it is clear that by the late fourth century more than a few cities reduced the number of public performances or eliminated them completely. The abandonment of a single building in the smaller cities or a few in the larger *metropoleis* marks the beginning of the cultural transformation in the region and includes the theaters in Antipatris, Scythopolis (north), Hippos, Pella, Philadelphia, and Petra,⁴⁸ the hippodromes in Caesarea (west), Scythopolis, and Gerasa,⁴⁹ and the amphitheaters in Caesarea and Eleutheropolis.⁵⁰

Abandoning buildings damaged by the earthquake or some other reason could be due to a city's lack of resources needed to renovate and maintain a structure, but this phenomenon could equally stem from a transformation in the local citizens' tastes or attitudes toward public entertainment. Recognizing the diminished popularity of the shows, and owing to a lack of public or private resources, and perhaps even encouraged by the local clergy, city officials refrained from restoring these buildings and renewing the performances.



FIGURE 6.3 Scythopolis, general view of the theater (courtesy of Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem; photo by Gabi Laron).

Some theaters were only partially damaged by the 363 CE earthquake, and the new architectural elements introduced into the buildings were associated with the renovations made immediately thereafter. In Sepphoris, for instance, a staircase was added in front of the eastern *vomitioria* outside the building, and in Scythopolis the two western entrances of the *odeon* were renovated.⁵¹ The *summa cavea* in Scythopolis's southern theater was never restored, thereby reducing the number of seats in the post-363 CE building by about one-third of the building's original capacity (Figure 6.3). An external staircase was added, giving access to the upper rows of the extant *cavea*; the stage floor was altered as well, being built partially of wood and partially of stone, and supported by arches.⁵²

The alterations made in the northern theater of Gadara and the conversion of one end of the hippodromes in Scythopolis and Gerasa into an oval amphitheater provide evidence for additional architectural modifications resulting from the exigencies of the new reality in the fourth century CE. In Gadara, construction materials were taken from the

dismantled *scaena*, whereas in Scythopolis and Gerasa the builders presumably reused stones from the deserted sections of the hippodrome.⁵³

In the course of the fifth century, additional buildings were abandoned or dismantled, further intensifying the process of abolishing public performances in the region. This includes the theater in Sepphoris and the *odeon* in Scythopolis, the latter having been dismantled after 450 CE. In fifth-century Samaria, private houses were constructed around the lower *cavea* and stage of what had been the city's theater, and several rooms were added to the *hyposcaenium* of the northern theater in Gerasa, thereby terminating the use of its stage.⁵⁴ The functionality of the amphitheaters built over the ruins of the hippodromes also ceased at this time. In Scythopolis, the arena was blocked by the early fifth century, only a few decades after its construction. Entrances to the building were narrowed by the construction of additional buildings, stairways to the *cavea* were partially blocked by new structures, and the entire area surrounding the amphitheater was occupied by private dwellings.⁵⁵ In Neapolis, the performances were terminated sometime in the fifth century, and by the early sixth the vaults served as living quarters and storage space.⁵⁶

To illustrate the magnitude of these changes in ancient Palestine and the Decapolis, the cultural life and leisure opportunities that were still available in some late antique cities should be explored. For example, in Caesarea only two out of five Roman buildings for mass entertainment were still functioning in the city in the second half of the fifth century, in Gerasa and Scythopolis probably only one out of four, and in Gadara one out of three. The decrease in the number of buildings in fifth-century Caesarea, for instance, is consistent with the picture emerging from the literary sources mentioned earlier that attest to fewer performances in this period.

Despite the general decline in the number of buildings functioning in ancient Palestine, public performances were still held in the fifth century in several other cities throughout the region. Some even made an effort to renovate their theaters, at times modifying the inner space

to meet new needs, such as supplementary shows or ensuring the visibility of the ruling power at these events. This includes not only the provincial capitals of Palaestina but also still-functioning theaters in other locales, at least up to the first decades of the sixth century.⁵⁷ In addition to the shows, the theaters now served as assembly places for public speeches.⁵⁸

Renovations were carried out by and large around the lower *cavea*, orchestra, and stage. In Tiberias, for instance, the *summa cavea* was demolished in the late fourth century, a *tribunal* was added at the bottom center of the lower *cavea* with a special staircase leading directly into it, and the central section of the stage floor was refurbished—the wings were paved with flagstones, and the stage itself, resting atop some pillars, with wood (Figure 6.4).⁵⁹ According to one Greek inscription, the pavement of the orchestra in Elusa was renovated in 454/455 “up to the old pavement” in the theater and was supervised by one Abraamius, son of Zenobis.⁶⁰ In the early sixth century, during the latest phase of the theater in Scythopolis (south), only the *ima cavea* was still in use. The entire stage was shortened and repaved with stones, seats were replaced with basalt slabs, and a fenced *tribunal* was added at the bottom center of the lower *cavea*.⁶¹

Special facilities were introduced in the late antique theater that apparently allowed for aquatic performances. In fifth-century Neapolis, the orchestra was converted into a pool measuring 20 by 30 meters, with a maximum depth of 1.5 meters.⁶² At this time, the lower parapet around the orchestra was slightly elevated, a raised passage paved with a simple geometric mosaic was added behind it, a large *tribunal* was built in the center of the walkway, and thick plaster was laid throughout the orchestra. Similar modifications and others as well were made in Caesarea. A shallow wall was constructed around the base of the *cavea*, the orchestra was extensively plastered, the niches in the *proscenium* were blocked, and the stage was partially paved with a mosaic floor.⁶³ In Shuni-Maiumas, a large pool was added behind the stage building (*scaena*) in the late fifth or early sixth century, in the time of the governor Flavius



FIGURE 6.4 Tiberias, view of the theater, looking east. Note the staircase to the left of the orchestra leading to a *tribunalia*, which was added in the center of the lower *cavea* (photo by Zeev Weiss).

Marcianus Antipater. This unique addition provides further evidence of aquatic performances held in conjunction with a theater. Its semicircular basin (50×26 m) is surrounded by an elevated pathway and paved with a simple mosaic floor containing two Greek inscriptions, each set within a *tabula ansata*. Three staircases led into the pool itself—one on its central axis and a smaller one on either side. The sizable inscriptions were located at the bottom of the staircases and could be seen by anyone entering the pool. Water reached this installation via an aqueduct running southward from the nearby spring at ‘En Zur.⁶⁴

All the buildings that were still operating in the early sixth century went out of use either during the reign of Justinian or close to his death. A fortress (*kastron*) with semicircular towers was constructed around the abandoned theater in Caesarea in the sixth century.⁶⁵ In Elusa the

theater was deserted sometime in the sixth century, in Neapolis and Shuni-Maiumas in the middle of that century, and in Scythopolis, Tiberias, and Gadara (north) immediately thereafter.⁶⁶ Some of the theaters abandoned in the late fourth and fifth centuries suffered further damage in the course of the sixth century and became sources of building materials (e.g., Gerasa's northern theater).⁶⁷

The eastern hippodrome in Caesarea (Figure 6.5), which functioned uninterrupted throughout late antiquity, was no longer in use after the mid-sixth century, whereas limited excavations conducted in Bostra's hippodrome suggest that it was in use until the sixth century.⁶⁸ Judging by the literary testimonies from Gaza, chariot races held in this city ended at about the same time.

The total number of buildings for mass entertainment—theaters, hippodromes, and amphitheaters—operating in late antique Palestine, the Decapolis, and Arabia is undoubtedly much lower than those that functioned in the region in Roman times. This conclusion is corroborated by the archaeological evidence but leaves some gaps, especially with regard to the theaters, the best-preserved monuments in the region. For example, there are no published archaeological data from Canatha, Philipopolis, and Bostra on the later use of the theaters, their architectural development, or abandonment. How, if at all, should one interpret this lack of evidence? Is it related to the degree of preservation at each site, to the scope of documentation produced during surveys and excavations, to the extent of detail in the final publication report? Or should it be argued, *ex silentio*, that these buildings, or at least some of them, were actually not in use in the fifth or sixth century? Needless to say, neither of the above options can be proved.

In what follows, the discussion will focus on the nature of the performances held in late antique Palestine. One should nevertheless bear in mind the limited scope of the evidence at hand when translating the implications of the archaeological, literary, and other evidence into cultural and behavioral terms.



FIGURE 6.5 Obelisk in the eastern hippodrome of Caesarea, after positioning it in the middle of the arena. *In the foreground:* several broken cones (*metae*) (courtesy of Yosef Porath).

Public Performances under Christian Hegemony

Roman public entertainment in all probability lost its appeal in ancient Palestine in the early Byzantine period. The decline in the number of buildings functioning in the early sixth century compared to the fourth, and the paucity of sources referring to the shows at this time, are indicative of the nature and intensity of the cultural change. Yet the same sources are also helpful in determining the types of shows that survived in late antiquity, their distribution in the region, and their continuity over time. Public performances had become secularized and were now pure entertainment devoid of pagan symbolism.⁶⁹ All populations were represented at the shows—Christians, Samaritans, and Jews; according to Choricus, not only the lower class attended the theater but also those of modest wealth and many of noble birth and great fortune.⁷⁰ The mime, he further argues, was contrived for relief and pleasure, whereas Jacob of Serugh remarks that people attended the theater for laughter and mere entertainment.⁷¹ What shows, then, were held in the cities of late antique Palestine to amuse the masses, and, based on the extant information, what can be said about their gradual disappearance over time?

Athletic competitions in ancient Palestine did not survive past the fourth century. The literary or epigraphical sources dealing with athletic competitions in our region do not go beyond that date, nor do the metaphors in patristic literature regarding the training of athletes testify to the continuation of athletic competitions in late antique Palestine. They, in fact, were intended to describe the ways of a disciplined Christian life and particularly that of the ascetic.⁷² The abandonment of the hippodrome—the multipurpose building used for chariot races and athletic competitions—in Caesarea (west) and Scythopolis or in Gerasa in the Decapolis in the course of the fourth century distinctly demonstrates the complete cessation of *agones* competitions. The dynamic games conducted in Roman times no longer played a role in the sociocultural life of the late antique city in ancient Palestine.

Gladiatorial combats, a genuine Roman form of entertainment, were not conducted either in the oval buildings that survived until the end of

the fourth century CE or in the subsequently remodeled structures, as these events had begun to lose popularity by the mid-fourth century. The buildings were now designated for exhibitions of exotic animals, animal combats, and animal baiting (*venationes*) that had prevailed throughout late antiquity and were probably more suitable to the cultural tastes and Christian code of behavior in late antique society.⁷³ The costs of staging such performances were very high and were controlled in this period by the governor, who also financed these shows in the provincial capital. The financial outlay and the need to procure an assortment of wild beasts were undoubtedly responsible for the infrequency of such events; such performances were probably more common in Caesarea (the capital of Palaestina Prima) or Scythopolis (the capital of Palaestina Secunda), where the governor in charge resided, than in Neapolis, Eleutheropolis, Gerasa, or Gadara, which were geographically off the beaten path and seemingly less important locales. Distance from the governmental seat, the lack of resources, and the infrequency of performances may well explain why the inhabitants of Gerasa, for example, invested less in remodeling their hippodrome to accommodate such spectacles than did the population in Scythopolis, which placed great importance on converting its hippodrome into an amphitheater.

The high costs of animal shows and the accompanying lack of incentive to invest in such events diminished their frequency and led to the ultimate abandonment and disappearance of amphitheaters in most cities in the course of the fifth century CE. Procopius of Gaza's panegyric of Anastasius for banning fights with wild beasts (498 CE) and the revival of animal-fighting in Choricus's day suggest that such shows were still featured, even if in only a few places, in the first half of the sixth century.⁷⁴ It has been suggested that the animal shows in their latest stage were tame and did not involve the slaughter of beasts in the arena. Such shows were now held in the still-functioning local hippodrome, such as that in Caesarea or Gaza.⁷⁵

Mimes, pantomimes, and musical performances now, as in earlier periods, were the main genre on the local stage from the fourth to sixth centuries⁷⁶ and were sometimes held in the local hippodrome to amuse

the masses between races.⁷⁷ References to the mime and pantomime, which maintained their popularity, found expression in the sermons of some local church spokesmen, but it is Choricius of Gaza, in his *Apologia Mimorum*, who provides the most salient information about the types of shows held in the region.⁷⁸ The number of cities featuring mime and pantomime performances declined over time, and judging by the limited number of buildings still functioning in the sixth century, they seem to have appeared in only a few locales.

Aquatic performances of dance or mime were held in only a few theaters that were now equipped with proper water installations—Neapolis, Caesarea, and Shuni-Maiumas.⁷⁹ These were held during the Graeco-Syrian Maiuma water festival that took place, for example, in Birketein, north of Gerasa in 535 CE and successive years (Figure 6.6).⁸⁰ Jugglers as well as some other light performers supplemented the entertainment program in the late antique theater.



FIGURE 6.6 Theater at Birketein, north of Gerasa, with a large pool behind it (photo by Zeev Weiss).

Chariot races were very popular in the late antique world, but in ancient Palestine they were less common than in Roman times and took place in only a few cities. As mentioned earlier, all but two of the excavated hippodromes in the region were abandoned sometime in the fourth century, while evidence for races focuses on just a few locales. The use of curses, supernatural performance-enhancers, and apotropaic devices signifies, as elsewhere, the vitality of the races wherever held in late antique Palestine.⁸¹

Caesarea is the only city in which the archaeological and epigraphical evidence verifies the ongoing use of its hippodrome (eastern) from Roman times until the sixth century.⁸² In Arabia, chariot races were presumably held in the local hippodrome of Bostra up to the sixth century; however, it is not clear until exactly when they lasted.

Some literary sources mentioned earlier note that chariot races were held in Gaza and Ascalon during this period as well, suggesting that the hippodromes constructed in Roman times were still active in both cities; neither, however, was ever identified or excavated. Julianus, the leader of the Samaritan revolt in 529, organized chariot races in Neapolis.⁸³ However, these could not have been held in the city's hippodrome, which in Roman times was transformed into an amphitheater and was no longer suitable for chariot races. There is no indication of the existence of another hippodrome in the city, nor it is likely that a new building of this type was constructed in Neapolis before the early sixth century, as no such structure was known to be erected in the cities of the eastern provinces after the third century CE. The races in Neapolis were actually a onetime event expressing self-autonomy in conjunction with the Samaritan revolt. They could have been held in an open-air field equipped with temporary starting gates, a barrier to separate the track, and wooden benches for the masses gathered around the racecourse.

In the fifth century CE, the circus factions—the Blues and the Greens—were introduced into ancient Palestine, significantly changing the character and organization of competitions in the region.⁸⁴ Chariot races were now conducted according to the Roman model, whereby professional charioteers belonging to official organizations participated in the

race. Public entertainment in the fifth and sixth centuries was financed largely by public funds, while performers, as argued by Alan Cameron, were organized “in one common state-financed and administered guild.”⁸⁵ The factions emerged for several reasons, but were particularly the result of a decline in the liturgical system of financing civic activities and the growing need to use public funds to sustain the races the people requested.⁸⁶ The Blues and the Greens were now responsible for providing all kinds of performances, including chariot races. Acting as an association of empire-wide factions, they brought under their wings synods of athletes and performers in various cities of the Roman East and took it upon themselves to handle all forms of entertainment.⁸⁷ Subventions for horse races and festivals were granted by governors in the sixth century.⁸⁸ Late antique Caesarea is a case in point, wherein special officials (*hippotrophi*) were charged with maintaining the stables and distributing imperial funds among the various factions in the city.⁸⁹

Rivalry between the circus factions and the enthusiasm of their followers left their mark in inscriptions and graffiti found throughout the empire. A few inscriptions from Aelia Capitolina, Scythopolis, Gerasa, and some small towns in Arabia exhorted the victory of the Blues, in all probability attesting to the popularity and vitality of the chariot races in the region.⁹⁰ The factional acclamations dating to the fifth and mainly sixth centuries were carved in stone or embedded in mosaics located in various buildings in several cities, far from the local hippodrome. In Gerasa, for instance, such an inscription appears in the room of a large building east of the *cardo*. In Scythopolis, it was incorporated in a sidewalk, in front of two shops constructed in a newly developed area east of the civic center and alongside the early Byzantine road leading southward. These acclamations were made at the time when the hippodrome was no longer functional (Gerasa and Scythopolis) and in places that never had a hippodrome (such as Umm el Jimal). Therefore, neither can attest to the existence of a hippodrome or the organization of chariot races in these locales.⁹¹ Instead, they suggest the existence of the factions operating in the urban realm of ancient Palestine and Arabia. The acclamations of the Blues were set up either by local fans who were responsible

for providing personnel and equipment for shows held in the theater or some other open public space, or by those involved simultaneously in civic politics and ceremonies. The factions were not political parties with a consistent policy; they were groups of people whose social, economic, and political interests labeled them and were exploited for purposes other than public entertainment.⁹²

The number and frequency of public performances slowly diminished in the course of late antiquity. In the early sixth century CE, they were held in only a few locales and completely disappeared by the end of Justinian's reign. The final section of this chapter will explore the possible reasons for the decline of public entertainment in late antique Palestine and its ultimate demise toward the end of the period.

The Termination of the Games in Ancient Palestine

As time passed, the frequency of public entertainment diminished throughout the region, and in the sixth century CE it was no longer considered an essential part of urban life. Christianity's hold on ancient Palestine became stronger from the fourth to sixth centuries. The number of churches established in the cities increased over time, reaching a peak in the sixth century, when the cities were deemed fully Christianized.⁹³ The intensity of Christianity's effort to turn the indigenous population's back on Roman public entertainment was intended presumably to cause the desired cultural change. The clergy rejected this leisure pastime primarily on moral and religious grounds, but their position did not prevent the members of their community from continuing to attend the various shows at the theater or hippodrome.⁹⁴

Despite their polemics against these spectacles, and knowing that their audience was well acquainted with public performances, the church fathers, like the rabbis, intentionally used current popular terminology, and even intricate metaphors, in their sermons to drive home their message (see Chap. 5).⁹⁵ The church fathers certainly did not approve of the immoral behavior connected with the spectacles and did all that was in their power to condemn the shows and put an end to them. The process

by which Christian writers and preachers sought to remold the attitudes and habits of the populace was a slow one. They attempted to persuade their congregants to embrace what they considered a more Christian way of life, pressure that seems to have challenged the sociocultural principles of the wider society and its demand for shows.⁹⁶

The story of the young man from Gaza mentioned earlier, who according to Procopius provided his city with races but personally refrained from watching the competitions, largely reflects Christian influence and also reveals a behavioral conflict among certain individuals: while his Christian beliefs condemned watching the races, he nevertheless felt obligated to support the races because they brought the city victory, honor, and fame enjoyed by the local population.

Choricus's drive to defend mime performances exposes yet another dimension relating to the cultural challenge and tension of public entertainment in his own society. The objections to mime ranged from the subject matter of the plays to the immorality of the actors and the negative effect the performances had on the audience. Choricus rejects the accusations and claims that theatrical shows, and especially mime, were invented to amuse people and induce laughter. In the course of his speech he mentions a law forbidding teachers from attending mime performances in the local theater and devotes a long diatribe against this law, indicating that while willing to accept the ban on other forms of entertainment—such as chariot races, hunting, and athletic performances—he is opposed to banning the mime.⁹⁷ He further argues that if you shut down the theaters without demolishing the buildings, it would be emotionally devastating for those who loved the shows and would never be able to forget them.⁹⁸

Choricus does not name his opponents, though it may be assumed that his statements were directed at the church.⁹⁹ Whoever his adversaries were and whatever he had in mind when composing his speech, the general impression is evident. In the early decades of the sixth century CE, public entertainment lost its popularity among his fellow citizens, who were probably willing to replace it with something they considered more attractive.

The fabric of life changed with the Christianization of ancient Palestine. However, as elsewhere, Christianity itself did not cause the suppression of the traditional games. Christian anti-game polemics provided emperors with ready-made pretexts to interfere and alter the pattern of public entertainment in the empire, when needed. In practice, however, despite repeated legislation in this regard, the emperors “could not afford to let the spectacles die,” to use John Liebeschuetz’s words, because they were so popular.¹⁰⁰

Riots incited in the theater and hippodrome at times led to the prohibition of spectacles in certain cities of the empire, yet urban violence alone did not affect the decline or discontinuation of public shows.¹⁰¹ Procopius complains that Justinian closed down theaters, hippodromes, and circuses, and later even ordered that these spectacles be closed down altogether to mitigate the burden on the public treasury.¹⁰² Although races continued after 550 CE, Alan Cameron suggests that increasing financial difficulties and the high cost of chariot racing made the ongoing maintenance of these events difficult.¹⁰³ David Potter argues that it was not the church that caused the demise of the ancient games but the lack of funds and changes in taste.¹⁰⁴ Averil Cameron maintains that the lack of resources could be applied in some places, but the true explanation for the abandonment of public shows “is likely to have been more complex.” Most cities, she opines, experienced a serious social, economic, and cultural transformation toward the end of the period, dramatically changing the urban lifestyle. The building patterns of and attitudes toward urban space were modified in the course of the sixth century CE. The city council was no longer functional; the city’s administration was now governed by officials, local landowners, a bishop, and clergy; the *curiales* escaped the city, and resources were now shifted to the church.¹⁰⁵ Within this complex reality, public entertainment could not avoid undergoing changes and its ultimate abandonment in the ancient city.

The array of finds emerging from the excavations in cities of ancient Palestine in recent years in most cases supports Averil Cameron’s argument regarding the cultural changes in the region.¹⁰⁶ The ongoing abandonment of buildings for mass entertainment from the late fourth to

sixth centuries reflects a gradual change in urban cultural values. The growing power of the church, the presence of a bishop and his clergy in the city, and their involvement in city affairs apparently had some effect on the cultural behavior of certain social segments. Yet the picture emerging from the cities throughout the region points to a more complex situation, wherein other factors played a role in defining the local stance toward the Roman games in late antiquity. The desertion of buildings for mass entertainment—some deliberate and others after being struck by the earthquake—suggests that the city could not sustain such expenses or, what seems more plausible, was no longer interested in holding the performances once held there. Blocking a building's entrances or utilizing its interior space for habitation or industrial purposes further demonstrates the functional transition after public performances lost their appeal. Public funds at times provided by provincial governors were now designated primarily for the construction and maintenance of more functional structures in the city—markets, piazzas, bathhouses, and water installations.¹⁰⁷ Donors earmarked their contributions for the construction of churches in the private sphere but were no longer willing to back the frivolity of the shows.¹⁰⁸

This new reality resulting from the Christianization of the Roman Empire greatly affected all aspects of civic life. By the early sixth century CE, public entertainment, or whatever was left of its past glory, lost its popularity with a large segment of Christian society, which was now willing to forgo this leisure activity in favor of other “spectacles” more conducive and appropriate to the religious realm. Alongside the negative attitudes toward the theater and the decrease in the popularity of public entertainment, the church, with its representational dramatic liturgy, triumphed over the rival pagan institutions.¹⁰⁹ Performances that once characterized the vibrant cultural life in the cities of ancient Palestine came to an end only a few decades later, during Justinian's reign. The monumental buildings that once served as a source of pride for a city's inhabitants waned over time, leaving behind the past glory that is still visible amid the missing stones.

Epilogue

THE PUBLIC SPECTACLES and competitions in the Roman East of Herod's day were revolutionary. Not only were the physical appearance and monumental character of the facilities innovative features, but the various performances held in them introduced the local population to a new cultural behavior that was completely foreign to their tradition and culture. The reactions of the indigenous population toward this novel cultural lifestyle were presumably diverse, but one thing has become evident: in constructing monumental buildings for mass entertainment and in conducting various performances, whether in his private palaces or in the cities throughout his kingdom, Herod changed the cultural habits of the local population and beyond the bounds of his realm.

The rise of public entertainment in ancient Palestine and its fall six centuries later was a long process shaped and influenced by several interrelated factors—economic, social, cultural, and religious. Assessing the sociocultural impact of Roman public entertainment in ancient Palestine over time, or the scope of its absorption or rejection among the various segments of society, requires the investigation of various complementary aspects—distribution of buildings and chronology, the

nature of the performances, and the balance of power between the rulers, the religious authorities, and the masses. Several parallels may be drawn when comparing the motivation for initiating public entertainment in ancient Palestine with the reasons for abolishing it at the end of the era.

While only a few cities of ancient Palestine held performances in the first century CE, the pace of construction, the growing number of buildings, and the diversity of the performances attest to the gradual nature of the process by which the local population in the first centuries CE became exposed to Graeco-Roman culture and expressed its willingness to assimilate this culture into its daily life. The adoption of new cultural modes began on a small scale in the Herodian period, became stronger in the second century, although proceeding at a different pace from place to place, and reached its peak in the Severan era. The abolition of public entertainment, like its inception and establishment in the early centuries of the Common Era, did not occur all at once. The number and frequency of public performances waned gradually in late antiquity. The decrease began in the second half of the fourth century CE, continued during the fifth, until such performances were held in only a few locales in the course of the early sixth century, and disappeared entirely by the end of Justinian's reign.

The repertoire of performances, competitions, and shows in ancient Palestine followed the same artistic program prevailing throughout the Roman Empire and in turn greatly affected the daily life and behavior of the local population, creating an interesting cultural *mélange* of East and West. A visitor to a building for mass entertainment in one of the cities of ancient Palestine, be it a guest from nearby or a foreigner from afar, blended in well with the local crowds and could enjoy the performance, competition, or show onstage or in the arena as if he were attending a similar event in his hometown.

Compared to other structures, the overall number of theaters was especially great, and their distribution over the region was wide, resulting in a cultural impact that was undoubtedly powerful and significant. Theatrical performances were offered in every city throughout the re-

gion and had a marked influence on the local population. Athletic competitions and chariot races also met with the cultural tastes of the inhabitants in the Graeco-Roman East; however, it appears that construction costs and long-term maintenance of the requisite public buildings, as well as the costs of holding shows in them, went beyond the financial means of most cities in Roman Palestine. Amphitheatrical shows designed to meet the growing desire for Roman culture among the population in the central administrative cities of Palestine were the least common form of entertainment in ancient Palestine. The literary sources that provide evidence of amphitheatrical performances suggest that once gladiatorial games and animal baiting were firmly established, at least in those cities that boasted a monumental amphitheater, the local populace, including the Jews, also began to enjoy these spectacles, despite their original disapproval.

When introducing public entertainment into ancient Palestine, Herod the Great did not begin with one or two types of shows and then gradually add more. Instead, he exposed his subjects all at once to the various public competitions and performances known at the time throughout the empire, making them available to the region as a whole. Their decline and demise in late antiquity was a longer and more complex process that was affected by various contemporary trends. Gladiatorial shows and athletic competitions were eliminated at a different pace over the fourth century and early fifth century. Animal fighting lasted longer, but in the early sixth century these shows, which were tame and did not involve the slaughter of beasts in the arena, were conducted in only a few cities. Theatrical performances and chariot races were ongoing from the Roman period and throughout late antiquity. Although these shows were popular elsewhere in the empire, their number and frequency in ancient Palestine slowly diminished in the course of time, and by the beginning of the sixth century only a few cities offered such performances. The last stage of this long cultural heritage in the region, which lasted six centuries, came to an end only a few decades later, during Justinian's reign, leaving behind the past glory of those spectacular events of Roman public entertainment.

From the beginning, the existence of a governmental authority, whether royal or municipal, was crucial to the promotion of these cultural expressions. It initiated, funded, and supervised the establishment of buildings for mass entertainment, as well as the ongoing organization and operation of performances. Herod the Great initiated public spectacles and competitions in the first stage, while in the first centuries of the Common Era the civic municipalities invested in them significantly, to complement and sustain the king's vision. However, the absence of a governmental authority whose interest lay in bolstering public entertainment in the cities of late antiquity, the lack of funds, changes in taste, and the shift in private resources to the church are the main reasons for the reversal of the sociocultural process that evolved in late antique Palestine.

What, then, was the role of the religious authorities in shaping cultural behavior, both at the beginning and after six centuries of supplying the public with performances that characterized contemporary urban life? In Herod's time, as was the case with the rabbis later on, there were those who persistently objected to foreign ways, on the grounds that they were immoral and violated traditions and customs. In practice, however, neither Jewish nor Christian leaders were influential enough to alter the cultural reality of their day, nor did they succeed in modifying the cultural behavior of their community members so that they would conform to their beliefs. The church fathers, like the rabbis, objected to Roman public entertainment on moral and religious grounds, while facing similar difficulties in dissuading their own communities, who attended the shows despite the objections of religious leaders. Nevertheless, the sociopolitical position of the Christian clergy was slightly different from that of the rabbis and, in the long run, was more influential and eventually became normative. Christianity itself did not cause the suppression of the traditional games, but Christian anti-game polemics managed to forge the consciousness of late antique society to some degree and ultimately effected the desired change.

Herod the Great, the king of Judaea, was able to overcome the obstacles posed by the religious leaders in his kingdom. In the centuries that

followed, his dreams were fulfilled beyond the boundaries of his realm. However, the Christian emperors, with their infinite power over the far-reaching empire, failed to resist the church fathers' attacks. The hunger of the masses for pure divertissements in late antiquity could not withstand the growing power of the church. The complex situation in the cities of late antiquity played an important role in defining the local attitude toward public entertainment, but at the end of the day the presence of a bishop and his clergy in the city, and their involvement in city affairs, led ultimately to the abolition of the Roman games in ancient Palestine, as elsewhere, and with no intention to turn the wheel back again.

Abbreviations

<i>AA</i>	<i>Archäologischer Anzeiger</i>
<i>ADAJ</i>	<i>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan</i>
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>ANES</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	Flavius Josephus, <i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
<i>B</i>	Babylonian Talmud
<i>B.A.R.</i>	British Archaeological Reports
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>BCH</i>	<i>Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique</i>
<i>BICS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies</i>
<i>CCSL</i>	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
<i>CIG</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum</i>
<i>CIIP</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae</i>
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>CPH</i>	<i>Corpus Papyrorum Hermopolitanorum</i>
<i>CPJ</i>	<i>Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum</i>
<i>CSHB</i>	Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae
<i>CTh</i>	Codex Theodosianus
<i>DaM</i>	<i>Damaszener Mitteilungen</i>
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
<i>ESI</i>	<i>Excavations and Surveys in Israel</i>
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek and Roman Byzantine Studies</i>

<i>HSCP</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>IGLS</i>	Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie
<i>INJ</i>	<i>Israel Numismatic Journal</i>
<i>J</i>	Jerusalem Talmud
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>JÖB</i>	<i>Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JRA</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
<i>LA</i>	<i>Liber Annuus</i>
<i>LCL</i>	Loeb Classical Library
<i>M</i>	Mishnah
<i>MDAIR</i>	<i>Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung</i>
<i>MGWJ</i>	<i>Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums</i>
<i>NEAEHL</i>	<i>The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i>
<i>PBSR</i>	<i>Papers of the British School at Rome</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>PG</i>	Patrologia Graeca
<i>PL</i>	Patrologia Latina
<i>QDAP</i>	<i>Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine</i>
<i>R.</i>	Rabbi
<i>REG</i>	<i>Revue des Études Grecques</i>
<i>REJ</i>	<i>Revue des Études Juives</i>
<i>SC</i>	Sources chrétiennes
<i>SCI</i>	<i>Scripta Classica Israelica</i>
<i>SH</i>	<i>Scripta Hierosolymitana</i>
<i>SHAJ</i>	<i>Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan</i>
<i>T</i>	Tosefta
<i>War</i>	Flavius Josephus, <i>The Jewish War</i>
<i>ZDPV</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

Notes

Introduction

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CHAPTER 1 The Beginning

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5. Ioannis Malalae, *Chronographia*, 9.21, ed. Ioannes Thurn, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 35 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 171; see also Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 456–458. On the theater, see Ioannis Malalae, *Chronographia*, 9.14, ed. Thurn, 169.
6. *Ant.* 13.389. At Marathus (‘Amrit) in Phoenicia, there is a stadium dated to the fourth–third centuries BCE; however, this date is surprising, especially in light of the fact that it predates such buildings in our region by several hundred years; see Nas-sib Saliby, “‘Amrit,” in *Archéologie et histoire de la Syrie*, vol. 2, *La Syrie de l'époque achéménide à l'avènement de l'Islam*, ed. Jean-Marie Dentzer and Winfried Orthmann, Schriften zur vorderasiatischen Archäologie 1 (Saarbrücken: Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag, 1989), 24–26.
7. Manfred Lämmer, “Griechische Wettkämpfe in Jerusalem und ihre politischen Hintergründe,” *Kölner Beiträge zur Sportwissenschaft* 2 (1973): 182–227.
8. Ronny Reich and Ya'akov Billig, “A Group of Theatre Seats Discovered near the Southwestern Corner of the Temple Mount,” *IEJ* 50 (2000): 175–184, and references there to earlier discussion of the possible role of the theater in the city. Most opinions regarding the role of the hippodrome in the Tyropoeon Valley were determined by Josephus's writings, in which he describes the events in the city after Herod's death, but scholars are divided regarding the precise location of this building in this area. For a summary of the opinions, see Lämmer, “Griechische Wettkämpfe in Jerusalem,” 191–194. Kloner and Whetstone, contrary to others, suggest that the Herodian hippodrome stood in the Valley of Hinnom, outside the wall of the Herodian city; see Amos Kloner and Sherry Whetstone, “The Hippodrome/Amphitheater in Jerusalem,” in “*Follow the Wise*” (*B Sanhedrin 32b*): *Studies in Jewish History and Culture in Honor of Lee I. Levine*, ed. Zeev Weiss et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Jewish Theological Seminary, 2010), 161–174.
9. *Ant.* 16.136–140, *War.* 1.415; see also Daniel R. Schwartz, *Agrippa I: The Last King of Judaea*, Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 23 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck,

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10. Antonio Frova et al., *Scavi di Caesarea Maritima* (Rome: “L’Erma” di Bretschneider, 1966).
 11. *Ibid.*, 93–112, 128–145.
 12. Yosef Porath, “Herod’s ‘Amphitheatre’ at Caesarea: A Multipurpose Entertainment Building,” in *The Roman and Byzantine Near East: Some Recent Archaeological Research*, ed. John H. Humphrey, *Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series* 14 (Ann Arbor, MI: *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 1995), 15–27.
 13. Yosef Porath, “Herod’s Circus at Caesarea: A Response to J. Patrich (*JRA* 14, 269–83),” *JRA* 16 (2003): 451–455. In contrast, Joseph Patrich maintains that this was only a temporary partition; see his “More on the Hippodrome-Stadium of Caesarea Maritima: A Response to the Comments of Y. Porath,” *JRA* 16 (2003): 459.
 14. Patrich and Porath disagree as to how the charioteers entered the arena of the Herodian hippodrome (Phase I) in Caesarea. Patrich maintains that they started the race in parallel lanes, aiming for the *meta prima*, as in the Greek-style horse races, while Porath argues that the lanes were arranged radially, running in the direction of the projected white line, adjacent to the *meta secunda*, as in the Roman circus; see Joseph Patrich, “The *Carceres* of the Herodian Hippodrome/Stadium at Caesarea Maritima and the Connections with the Circus Maximus,” *JRA* 14 (2001): 269–283; Porath; “Herod’s Circus,” 455.
 15. Amphitheater: *Ant.* 17.161. Hippodrome: *Ant.* 17.174–178; cf. *War* 1.659.
 16. *Ant.* 17.193–194; *War* 1.666.
 17. Ehud Netzer, *Hasmonean and Herodian Palaces at Jericho: Final Reports of the 1973–1987 Excavations*, vol. 2, *Stratigraphy and Architecture: The Coins* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2004), 195–225. For the possible date of construction of the complex, see Netzer, *Architecture of Herod*, 305.
 18. *Ant.* 15.296–298; *War* 1.403.
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 20. *Ibid.*, 46–49; John W. Crowfoot, Grace M. Crowfoot, and Kathleen M. Kenyon, *The Objects from Samaria*, Samaria-Sebaste 3 (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1957), 6, 39–41, 72–73. On the cult of Kore in Samaria and the temple Herod built in

- the city, see Jodi Magness, “The Cults of Isis and Kore at Samaria-Sebaste in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods,” *HTR* 94 (2001): 157–177.
21. Ehud Netzer et al., “Preliminary Report on Herod’s Mausoleum and Theatre with a Royal Box at Herodium,” *JRA* 23 (2010): 84–108. A long and narrow track (ca. 30 × 350 m) was discovered on the grounds of the palace in Lower Herodium. Although it appears that the site was not wide enough for holding competitions, Humphrey maintains that it was intended for horse races and could have been used for exercise and chariot-driving practice; see Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 531. Netzer, for his part (*Architecture of Herod*, 195–199), claims that the building was not wide enough for horse races and it was too long for athletic competitions, and thus surmises that the track was planned and built especially for Herod’s magnificent funeral procession, which concluded in Herodium (*War* 1.670–673).
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 23. *Ant.* 17.254–255; *War* 2.43–44.
 24. *Ant.* 18.57–59; *War* 2.172–174.
 25. Pilate: *Ant.* 18.57; *War* 2.172–174. Vespasian: *War* 3.539–540.
 26. *Ant.* 17.161; according to another version, this was a theater; see Ralph Marcus and Allen P. Wikgren, trans., *Josephus, Jewish Antiquities, Books XVI–XVII*, vol. 8, LCL 410, repr. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 444 n. 10.
 27. *Ant.* 17.155–163.
 28. John H. Humphrey, “‘Amphitheatrical’ Hippo-Stadia,” in *Caesarea Maritima: Retrospective after Two Millennia*, ed. Avner Raban and Kenneth G. Holum, *Documenta et monumenta Orientis antiqui* 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 121–129. Similarly, it should be noted that in the first century CE the assembly hall of the Jews of Cyrene was also called an amphitheater, although it clearly was not; see Shimon Applebaum, *Greeks and Jews in Ancient Cyrene*, *Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity* 28 (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 160–167.
 29. Humphrey, “‘Amphitheatrical’ Hippo-Stadia,” 125–127. Porath maintains that the Roman-style building Herod constructed in Caesarea should be called a circus; see Yosef Porath, “Why Did Josephus Name the Chariot-Racing Facility at Caesarea ‘Amphitheater’?” *SCI* 23 (2004): 63–67. Similarly, stadiums from the Greek East were used in the Roman period not only for Greek athletics but also for Roman spectacles—gladiatorial combats, animal baiting, and executions; see Katherine E. Welch, “Greek Stadia and Roman Spectacles: Asia, Athens, and the Tomb of Herodes Atticus,” *JRA* 11 (1998): 117–145.
 30. Adding a net to protect the spectators is known elsewhere as well, including places that had a high podium; see Jean-Claude Golvin, *L’amphithéâtre romain: Essai sur la théorisation de sa forme et de ses fonctions*, Publications du Centre Pierre Paris 18,

- 2 vols. (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1988), 1:317–318. On matters of safety stemming from gladiatorial spectacles and animal baiting in the arena, see Alex Scobie, “Spectator Security and Comfort at Gladiatorial Games,” *Nikephoros* 1 (1988): 191–243. Scobie (ibid., 210–211) claims that the net was placed on the floor of the arena about 2 meters or more from the podium, and not at the top. Therefore, the spectators in the *cavea* enjoyed double protection.
31. M ‘Avodah Zarah 1, 7.
 32. M Bava Qamma 4, 4. The bull, such as that depicted in the Zliten or Silin mosaics, for example, was one of the animals introduced into the arena; see Augusta Höhle, “Das Mosaik von Zliten: Ein Munus für höchste Ansprüche,” *Antike Welt* 13/4 (1982): 22–28; Omar Al-Mahjub, “I mosaici della villa romana di Silin,” in *III Colloquio internazionale sul mosaico antico*, ed. Raffaella Farioli (Ravenna: Edizioni del Girasole, 1983), 1:302–305. One funerary inscription from Tomis, on the shore of the Black Sea, specified the hunting of a wild bull in the stadium; see Louis Robert, *Les gladiateurs dans l’Orient Grec*, Bibliothèque de l’École des hautes études: Sciences philologiques et historiques 278 (Paris: E. Champion, 1940; Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1971), 107, no. 47.
 33. T ‘Avodah Zarah 2, 7, ed. Moshe S. Zuckerman (Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrman, 1937), 46 [Hebrew]. See also the discussion in Chapter 5.
 34. David S. Potter, “Entertainers in the Roman Empire,” in *Life, Death, and Entertainment in the Roman Empire*, ed. David S. Potter and David J. Mattingly (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 256–325, with references to other studies.
 35. Arnold H. M. Jones, *The Greek City from Alexander to Justinian* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1940), 230–235; David G. Romano, “Boycotts, Bribes and Fines: The Ancient Olympic Games,” *Expedition* 27, no. 2 (1985): 10–21; Michael B. Poliakov, *Combat Sports in the Ancient World: Competition, Violence, and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 18–19.
 36. Onno van Nijf, “Local Heroes: Athletics, Festivals and Elite Self-Fashioning in the Roman East,” in *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of the Empire*, ed. Simon Goldhill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 307–312. In contrast to what was customary, some cities granted a monetary prize in addition to the wreath in order to attract the best athletes to their games; see Henri W. Pleket, “Games, Prizes, Athletes and Ideology,” *Arena* 1 (1975): 61–71. Robert maintains that these prizes were depicted on coins from Asia Minor; see Louis Robert, “Les boules dans les types monétaires agonistiques,” *Hellenica* 7 (1949): 93–104.
 37. Wolfgang Leschhorn, “Die Verbreitung von Agonen in den östlichen Provinzen des römischen Reiches,” *Stadion* 24, no. 1 (1998): 31–57. This is also expressed by the significant increase in agonistic depictions under Commodus on city coins in the Roman East; see Dietrich O. A. Klose, “Festivals and Games in the Cities of the East during the Roman Empire,” in *Coinage and Identity in the Roman Prov-*

- inces*, ed. Christopher Howgego et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 125–133.
38. Jones, *Greek City*, 231–232; Pleket, “Games, Prizes,” 56–60. A number of inscriptions found in Oenoanda in Lycia tell of several festivals held in the city that featured athletic competitions and artistic performances in which people from outside the city also participated; see Alan Hall and Nicholas Milner, “Education and Athletics: Documents Illustrating the Festivals of Oenoanda,” in *Studies in the History and Topography of Lycia and Pisidia: In Memoriam A. S. Hall*, ed. David French, British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara Monograph 19 (London: British Institute of Archaeology in Ankara, 1994), 7–47; Stephen Mitchell, “Festivals, Games, and Civic Life in Roman Asia Minor,” *JRS* 80 (1990): 183–193.
 39. William J. Slater, “Hadrian’s Letters to the Athletes and Dionysiac Artists concerning the Arrangements for the ‘Circuit’ of Games,” *JRA* 21 (2008): 610–620.
 40. Fik Meijer, *Chariot Racing in the Roman Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 65–81. On the horses, their training, and the type of races held in the Roman circus, see Ann Hyland, *Equus: The Horse in the Roman World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 201–230.
 41. Bela I. Sandor, “The Genesis and Performance Characteristics of Roman Chariots,” *JRA* 25 (2012): 475–485.
 42. Richard C. Beacham, *The Roman Theatre and Its Audience* (London: Routledge, 1991), 117–198.
 43. Geoffrey Greatrex and John W. Watt, “One, Two or Three Feasts? The Brytae, the Maiuma and the May Festival at Edessa,” *Oriens Christianus* 83 (1999): 1–21; Nicole Belayche, *Iudaea-Palaestina: The Pagan Cults in Roman Palestine (Second to Fourth Century)* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 249–253.
 44. Thomas Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators* (London: Routledge, 1992), 1–101; Ronald Auguet, *Cruelty and Civilization: The Roman Games* (London: Routledge, 1994), 19–106.
 45. Jerusalem: *Ant.* 15.268–275. Caesarea: *Ant.* 16.136–141; *War* 1.415.
 46. The competitions in Olympia and Delphi separated children and adults; other games had three groups; see Joachim Ebert, “Paidēs Pythikoi,” *Philologus* 109 (1965): 152–156.
 47. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *Greek Comedy, Hellenistic Literature, Greek Religion, and Miscellanea: The Academic Papers of Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 170. In Roman times, this term included drama; see François Kayser, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques et latines (non funéraires) d’Alexandrie impériale (Ier–IIIe s. apr. J.-C.)* (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale du Caire, 1994), 299–301.
 48. Vitruvius, *De Architectura* 5.7.2, ed. and trans. Frank Granger, 2 vols., LCL 251 and 280 (London: Heinemann, 1931; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).
 49. Fernand Robert, *Thymélè: Recherches sur la signification et la destination des monuments circulaires dans l’architecture religieuse de la Grèce* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1939), 289–292.

50. Lämmer, “Griechische Wettkämpfe in Jerusalem,” 187 n. 10. Malalas lists the *thymelikoí* among the theatrical performances in the games Claudius initiated in Antioch in 43/44 CE, but provides no details regarding the nature of these contests; see Ioannis Malalae, *Chronographia*, 10.27, ed. Thurn, 188.
51. *Ant.* 19.343. In Berytus, Agrippa held various *theōriai* in the theater and gladiatorial spectacles (*monomachie*) in the amphitheater; see *Ant.* 19.335–336. *Theōriai* is the overall name for theater performances and is often seen in dedicatory inscriptions from the imperial era; see Louis Robert, *Études anatoliennes: Recherches sur les inscriptions grecques de l’Asie* (Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1970), 318–319.
52. Polybius attests that Antiochus Epiphanes held animal-baiting events in our region in the mid-second century BCE; see Polybius, *The Histories*, 30.25.1–26.1, ed. William R. Paton, vol. 6, LCL 161 (London: Heinemann, 1954). This onetime event was inspired by the Roman games but did not leave a lasting impression; see Linda-Marie Günther, “Gladiatoren beim Fest Antiochos’ IV. zu Daphne (166 v. Chr.)?” *Hermes* 117 (1980): 250–252.
53. *Ant.* 16.137.
54. Katherine E. Welch, “Stadium at Aphrodisias,” *AJA* 102 (1998): 547–569; Welch, “Greek Stadia and Roman Spectacles,” 117–145.
55. Ioannis Malalae, *Chronographia*, 10.27, ed. Thurn, 188.
56. Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 B.C.–A.D. 337* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 353–356 (quote on 355).
57. Duane W. Roller, *The Building Program of Herod the Great* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 85–124; Netzer, *Architecture of Herod*, 288–294.
58. Frank Sear, *Roman Theatres: An Architectural Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 132–135, 177, 252. Similarly, Nielsen assumes that the Cripti Balbi theater served as a model for the Herodian theater in Damascus; see Tom F. Nielsen, “The Roman Theatre: Historical Context and Reconstruction,” in *Bayt al-Aqqad: The History and Restoration of a House in Old Damascus*, ed. Peder Mortensen, Proceedings of the Danish Institute in Damascus 4 (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2005), 203–224.
59. Fropa et al., *Scavi di Caesarea Maritima*, 93–112.
60. Ibid., 128–145; Margaret Lyttelton, *Baroque Architecture in Classical Antiquity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 202–203.
61. Edward N. Gardiner, *Athletics of the Ancient World* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930; repr. Mineola, NY: Dover, 2002), 128–133; Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 525–528.
62. The excavators have remarked that the length of the track in Samaria was close to the Olympic size, but for some unclear reason its width was double the standard dimension; see Crowfoot, Kenyon, and Sukenik, *Buildings of Samaria*, 48–49. The racetrack was indeed short in comparison to those in Jericho and Caesarea, but the width of all of them was almost identical. If only athletic competitions were held there, then why was the width of the track doubled, and why was there no comparable track in any other stadium? For this reason the building in Samaria can be

- classified together with those in Jericho and Caesarea, and it is possible that it, like the others, was a multipurpose facility.
63. A similar layout with a permanent *spina* and two separate *metae* is known in the circus constructed in the mid- to late Augustan period in Corinth; see David G. Romano, “A Roman Circus in Corinth,” *Hesperia* 75 (2005): 585–611.
 64. Adolf Hoffmann, “Aizanoi: Zweiter Vorbericht über die Arbeiten im Stadion 1987, 1988 und 1990,” *AA* 3 (1993): 437–473. Alterations and additions were introduced into the theater and stadium in the second half of the second century CE; see Corinna Rohn, “Die Arbeiten am Theater-Stadion-Komplex von Aizanoi,” *AA* 2 (2001): 303–317.
 65. Gardiner, *Athletics of the Ancient World*, 72–80. See also Vitruvius’s description of the *palaestra* (*De Architectura* 5.11). Another possible source of influence could be the Roman agora in Delos, a building that combines a *palaestra*, a colonnaded complex, and an arena for athletic competitions and gladiators; see Nicholas K. Rauh, “Was the Agora of the Italians an *Établissement de Sport*?” *BCH* 116 (1992): 293–333.
 66. *Ant.* 16.149; *War* 1.426–428; see also Manfred Lämmer, “King Herod’s Endowment to the Olympic Games,” in *Proceedings of the Pre-Olympic Seminar on the History of Physical Education and Sport in Asia*, ed. Uriel Simri (Netanya: Wingate Institute and Israel Ministry of Education and Sport, 1972), 31–50. On the date of Herod’s third trip to Rome, see Roller, *Building Program*, 66–75, with references to earlier studies. On the gymnasium building and its facilities in Olympia, see Ludwig Drees, *Olympia: Gods, Artists, and Athletes* (New York: Praeger, 1968), 47–48.
 67. Jean Delorme, *Gymnasion: Étude sur les monuments consacrés à l’éducation en Grèce (des origines à l’empire romain)* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1960), 171–178.
 68. Sear, *Roman Theatres*, 46–47; and with regard to Hellenistic palaces, cf. Inge Nielsen, *Hellenistic Palaces: Tradition and Renewal*, *Studies in Hellenistic Civilization* 5 (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1999), 25–26, 214–215.
 69. Kathryn Louise Gleason, “Ruler and Spectacle: The Promontory Palace,” in *Caesarea Maritima: Retrospective after Two Millennia*, ed. Avner Raban and Kenneth G. Holum, *Documenta et Monumenta Orientis antiqui* 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 208–227. According to Burrell, the cult in Caesarea, the games he established there and the names of the city and port—Caesarea and Sebastos—attest to Herod’s alliance with Rome and its ruler; see Barbara Burrell, “Herod’s Caesarea on Sebastos: Urban Structures and Influences,” in *Herod and Augustus: Papers Presented at the IJS Conference, 21st–23rd June 2005*, ed. David M. Jacobson and Nikos Kokkinos, *IJS Studies in Judaica* 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 217–233. Patrich, for his part, maintains that Herod was influenced primarily by patterns of rule and building techniques in the Hellenistic East, especially in Alexandria; see Joseph Patrich, “Herodian Caesarea: The Urban Space,” in *The World of the Herods*, ed. Nikos Kokkinos (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2007), 93–129.

70. Gideon Foerster, “Hellenistic and Roman Trends in the Herodian Architecture of Masada,” in *Judaea and the Greco-Roman World in the Time of Herod in the Light of the Archaeological Evidence: Acts of a Symposium*, ed. Klaus Fittschen and Gideon Foerster, Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-historische Klasse 215 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 55–72; Reinhard Förtsch, “The Residences of King Herod and Their Relations to Roman Villa Architecture,” *ibid.*, 73–119. According to Japp and Rozenberg, the architectural decorations, wall paintings, and mosaics are indicative of influences from Hellenistic and Roman art; however, the early period shows a clear preference for Hellenistic traditions, while the late period, through its close ties with Rome and perhaps also owing to Herod’s visits abroad, exhibits a penchant toward Roman traditions; see Sarah Japp, “Public and Private Decorative Art in the Time of Herod the Great,” in Kokkinos, *The World of the Herods*, 227–246; Silvia Rozenberg, “Wall Paintings of the Hellenistic and Herodian Period in the Land of Israel,” in Jacobson and Kokkinos, *Herod and Augustus*, 249–265.
71. Katherine E. Welch, *The Roman Amphitheatre: From Its Origins to the Colosseum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 102–127; Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 73–77.
72. Ehud Netzer, “Palaces and the Planning of Complexes in Herod’s Realm,” in Jacobson and Kokkinos, *Herod and Augustus*, 171–180. For a wider discussion of the existing trends in Roman architecture in the Augustan era and the status of Herod’s building projects, see Karl Galinsky, “The Augustan Programme of Cultural Renewal and Herod,” *ibid.*, 29–42.
73. On the periods of building in ancient Palestine and on the connection between Herod’s activity and later construction, see the discussion in Chapter 2.
74. *Ant.* 19.343; see also D. R. Schwartz, *Agrippa I*, 110–111. According to Kokkinos, this happened in 44 CE, during the *hyper sôtērias* festival celebrated in the city in honor of Claudius; see Nikos Kokkinos, *The Herodian Dynasty: Origins, Role in Society and Eclipse*, Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha, Supplement Series 30 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 378. On the games during the reign of Agrippa I, see Manfred Lämmer, “The Attitude of King Agrippa I towards Greek Contests and Roman Games,” *Physical Education and Sports in the Jewish History and Culture, Proceedings of an International Seminar at Wingate Institute, July 1973*, ed. Uriel Simri (Netanya: Wingate Institute 1981), 7–17. Lämmer suggests that, unlike Herod, Agrippa held games only in gentile regions, and therefore he assumes that the king also held games in Panaeas when he appropriated Philip’s kingdom.
75. *War* 7.37–39. Chapman believes that the spectacles in the East in which Jews were executed constitute one link in the story of the Flavian victory that Josephus describes in his *War*: “not simply as passive entertainment but as an active political statement aimed at his own audience”; see Honora H. Chapman, “Spectacle in Josephus’ *Jewish War*,” in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome*, ed. Jonathan Edmond-

- son, Steve Mason, and James Rives (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 289–313 (quote on 312).
76. Jan W. van Henten, “The *Panegyris* in Jerusalem: Responses to Herod’s Initiative (Josephus, *Antiquities* 15:268–291),” in *Empsychoi Logoi—Religious Innovations in Antiquity: Studies in Honour of Pieter Willem van der Horst*, ed. Alberdina Houtman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 151–173.
 77. Joseph Patrich, “Herod’s Theatre in Jerusalem: A New Proposal,” *IEJ* 52 (2002): 231–238. In his discussions of the Herodian buildings for mass entertainment, Patrich goes even further, saying that all the construction was originally of wood and that in the course of the period it underwent a complete turnabout to stone in Caesarea; see Patrich, “Herodian Entertainment Structures,” in Jacobson and Kokinos, *Herod and Augustus*, 181–213.
 78. Achim Lichtenberger, “Jesus and the Theater in Jerusalem,” in *Jesus and Archaeology*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 283–299.
 79. Such is the case, for example, in the theater Herod built in Damascus; see Freyberger, “Theatre of Herod the Great,” 181–210.
 80. The words *ek petras* are problematic on two counts: How are they to be read and understood? Niese did not read them in his edition, relying as he did on Manuscript P and on the fact that they are not reflected in the ancient Latin translation. Schalit, following Niese, did not relate to these words either in his Hebrew translation of *Jewish Antiquities*. Nevertheless, these words appear in most of the original manuscripts and were adopted in Marcus’s Greek version in the LCL edition; van Henten (who so generously informed me) relies on this formulation in the English commentary he is preparing of *Antiquities* 15–17. It appears that they are correct since it is hard to imagine why an author would invent these words, which disturb the parallelism in the sentence and the context of which goes on to mention the amphitheater without relating to the material from which it was constructed. These words are therefore recognized as a *lectio difficilior*. As for the fact that in the parallel source in *War* (1.415) there is no reference to stones, but only that the theater is next to the amphitheater, that is not proof that *Antiquities*’ version is secondary; it only confirms that the description in *War* was edited and therefore more concise. Therefore, even if the description there was composed on the basis of a common source that was at Josephus’s disposal when he was preparing his *Antiquities*, it is possible that he, or an editor (see *Against Apion* 1.50!) decided to omit this detail, perhaps based on one of the considerations that we attributed to the author of MS P and the Latin translator, i.e., the words are not interesting and also corrupt the parallelism between the theater and the amphitheater. As for the interpretation of the words: Marcus translates “built a theatre of stone,” as if he is relating to the building materials, but it seems that it should be translated as explained in the text. I would like to thank my colleague and friend, Professor Daniel R. Schwartz, with whom I discussed this matter.

81. Compare *Ant.* 15.392, where it is written that the Temple was built “out of white stones” (*ek lithôn leukôn*), and *Ant.* 13.41, which mentions that the walls of Jerusalem were built “out of square stones” (*ek lithôn tetragônôn*).
82. Josephus uses *petra* to indicate “rock” (*War* 2.573), and in his description of the Antonia (*War* 5.238–239) he even makes a distinction between the two words, i.e., that *petra* is the rock on which the fortress was built, and *leiais lithôn* (smooth flagstones) were used to pave its floor.
83. *Ant.* 15.268.
84. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 528–533; Patrich, “Herodian Entertainment Structures,” 192–193.
85. Sear (*Roman Theatres*, 48–67) surmises that the Senate’s opposition to the construction of a permanent theater in Rome derived primary from its refusal “to create an assembly place for the people, a forum for agitation” (p. 56).
86. *Ant.* 15.272, 277–279.
87. On the trophies, their components, and significance in Roman society in the Augustan era, see Gilbert Ch. Picard, *Les trophées romains: Contribution à l’histoire de la religion et de l’art triomphal de Rome*, Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d’Athènes et de Rome 187 (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1957), 229–370.
88. Plutarch, *Pompey* 45.1–46.1; cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 36.41; see also Richard C. Beacham, *Spectacle Entertainments of Early Imperial Rome* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 61–74. On the political and religious circumstances that led Pompey to present this complex to Rome, see Mark A. Temelini, “Pompey’s Politics and the Presentation of His Theatre-Temple Complex, 61–52 BCE,” *Studia Humaniora Tartuensia* 7 (2006): 1–14.
89. On Herod’s visit to Rome and the influence of the Opera Pompeiana on his building projects, see Gleason, “Ruler and Spectacle,” 208–227.
90. An inscription from Gytheio in Laconia describes a procession in 15 CE, in which three painted *eikones* representing Divus Augustus, Tiberius, and Livia were carried during the *thymelikoi agônes* and subsequently placed in the middle of the theater; see Robert K. Sherk, *The Roman Empire: Augustus to Hadrian*, Translated Documents of Greece and Rome 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), no. 32. On objects carried during similar processions and set in the theater, see Elizabeth R. Gebhard, “The Theater and the City,” in *Roman Theater and Society: E. Togo Salmon Papers*, ed. William J. Slater (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 113–127. Nicolet maintains that certain symbols expressing ecumenical presence and Roman domination were placed elsewhere in the Roman world, e.g., by Herod in Jerusalem, while expressing his loyalty to the central governmental power; see Claude Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politics in the Early Empire*, Jerome Lectures 19 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 38–45.
91. Other scholars support a similar conclusion; see, e.g., Harold A. Harris, *Greek Athletics and the Jews* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976), 36–43; Lämmer,

- “Griechische Wettkämpfe in Jerusalem,” 189, 191–192; Lämmer, “Die Kaiserspiele von Caesarea,” 115–128; Lee I. Levine, *Jerusalem: Portrait of the City in the Second Temple Period (538 B.C.E.–70 C.E.)* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 201–206.
92. Martin Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), 302–317.
 93. Walid Atrash, “The Roman Theater at Tiberias,” *Qadmoniot* 144 (2012): 79–83 (Hebrew).
 94. Tarichaeae: *War* 2.598; Josephus, *The Life*, 132, ed. Henry St. John Thackeray, vol. 1, LCL 186 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 50–52. According to most scholars, Tarichaeae was located north of Tiberias, by the Sea of Galilee; Kokkinos suggests that it should be identified south of Tiberias, while its hippodrome was most probably located in the plain to its north; see Nikos Kokkinos, “The Location of Tarichaea: North or South of Tiberias?” *PEQ* 142 (2010): 7–23. Tiberias: *War* 2.618; *Life* 92, 331; see also Manfred Lämmer, “Griechische Wettkämpfe in Galiläa unter der Herrschaft des Herodes Antipas,” *Kölner Beiträge zur Sportwissenschaft* 5 (1976): 37–67; Zeev Weiss, “Josephus and Archaeology on the Cities of the Galilee,” in *Making History: Josephus and Historical Method*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 110 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 390–391. Jensen maintains that there is no proof that Herod Antipas erected a stadium in Tiberias, although it is possible that it was built during the period of Roman administration after Agrippa’s death; see Morten H. Jensen, *Herod Antipas in Galilee: The Literary and Archaeological Sources on the Reign of Herod Antipas and Its Socio-Economic Impact on Galilee*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/215 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 144–145. It is hard to justify this opinion, not only because the procurators did not fund the construction of such buildings, but because there is a direct connection, as we shall learn in Chapter 2, between municipal entrepreneurship and financing buildings. Judging by the events during the Great Revolt, the inhabitants of Tiberias took an anti-Roman stance, and therefore it would be difficult to assume that they initiated the construction of a stadium in the mid-first century CE. Several scholars have attributed the theater in Sepphoris to Herod Antipas’s building projects in the city; however, renewed excavations at the site inform us that this building was constructed toward the end of the first century CE or even at the beginning of the second, when the city witnessed a surge in building activity; see Weiss, “Josephus and Archaeology,” 400–404, and references there to earlier studies.
 95. Moshe Hartal, “Tiberias, Galei Kinneret,” *ESI* 120 (2008): www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.asp?id=773&mag_id=114 (accessed October 15, 2012).
 96. Petra: Philip C. Hammond, *The Excavation of the Main Theater at Petra, 1961–1962: Final Report*, Colt Archaeological Institute Publications (London: B. Quaritch, 1965), 62–65. According to McKenzie, the theater should be dated not too early in the first century CE; see Judith McKenzie, *The Architecture of Petra*, British

- Academy Monographs in Archaeology 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 35, 43. Building activities, including the construction of theaters, took place in the Nabataean kingdom during Herod's reign and in the ensuing period; Schmid maintains, however, that it is difficult to determine if the changes there express the Zeitgeist or reflect the Nabataean king's desire to compete with Herod, since, like the former, he wished to demonstrate his loyalty to Rome; see Stephan G. Schmid, "Nabataean Royal Propaganda: A Response to Herod and Augustus," in Jacobson and Kokkinos, *Herod and Augustus*, 325–359.
97. Klaus S. Freyberger, "Das Theater in Kanatha: Funktion und Bedeutung," *Antigüedad y Cristianismo* 21 (2004): 25–27.
 98. Scythopolis: Walid Atrash, "Entertainment Structures in the Civic Center of Nysa-Scythopolis (Beth-She'an) during the Roman and Byzantine Periods" (PhD diss., University of Haifa, 2006), 49–50, 83–85 (Hebrew). Gadara: Claudia Bührig, "Das Theater-Tempel-Areal von Gadara / Umm Qais: Struktureller Wandel eines urbanen Raumes," *Zeitschrift für Orient-Archäologie* 2 (2009): 173–175. On a first-century actor from Ascalon, see Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 203–205, trans. Francis H. Colson, vol. 10, LCL 379 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 105–107.
 99. "These are susceptible to uncleanness as things used for riding upon. . . . R. Yose says: A horse-cloth is also susceptible to uncleanness as a thing used for sitting upon since they rest thereon in the arena (= *campon*)" (M Kelim 23, 2; see also Sifra, Metzora' 3, 11, ed. Isaac H. Weiss [New York: Ohm, 1947], 76b). Reference to a horse here creates a conclusive connection with horse races in the hippodrome. Horse riding is included on the list of races that Herod conducted in Jerusalem; see *Ant.* 15.271.
 100. Van Henten maintains that Herod was aware of the religious constraints in Jerusalem, and therefore the celebrations there lacked a religious dimension; see van Henten, "Panegyris in Jerusalem," 161–164.
 101. Also Seneca disqualifies the Roman custom of throwing criminals into the arena to satisfy the masses' appetite for this type of entertainment; see Seneca, *Epistulae Morales* 7. On Seneca's position regarding this matter, see Magnus Wistrand, "Violence and Entertainment in Seneca the Younger," *Eranos* 88 (1990): 31–46.
 102. Sifra, Aḥarei Mot, Parashah 9, 13, 9, ed. Isaac H. Weiss (New York: Om Publishing, 1946), 86.
 103. *Ant.* 19.332–334. On Simon's words, his criticism, and its significance, see D. R. Schwartz, *Agrippa I*, 124–130.
 104. Levine opines that the construction of the buildings did not create any unusual waves in Jerusalem and that the inhabitants' reaction does not necessarily reflect the attitude of all the city's population, but rather the position of the sources on which Josephus relies; see Lee I. Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence?* The Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 55–61.

105. R. Hanan attests that the story about the stealing of fruit in Caesarea “was on that same sabbatical year, and the gentiles went to their circuses and left the marketplace full of fruit, and the Jews came and pillaged the merchandise” (T Oholot 18, 16, ed. Zuckerman, 617). If this incident indeed occurred in the first century CE, then it alludes to the fact that—unlike the rest of Caesarea’s inhabitants—the Jews, or at least the majority of them, might not have attended the performances held in the municipal circus, i.e., the hippo-stadium that was exposed in Caesarea.
106. Joseph Geiger, “Herodes Philorhomaïos,” *Ancient Society* 28 (1997): 75–88. Lichtenberger maintains that Herod adopted Roman material culture because of its luxurious air and superior quality. He therefore argues that Romanization in Herod’s kingdom was not a goal unto itself, but rather a result of the king’s claim to be a Hellenistic king; see Achim Lichtenberger, “Herod and Rome: Was Romanization a Goal of the Building Policy of Herod?” in Jacobson and Kokkinos, *Herod and Augustus*, 43–62.

CHAPTER 2 Shaping the City’s Landscape

1. Caesarea: Antonio Frova et al., *Scavi di Caesarea Maritima: Della Missione Archeologica Italiana diretta da A. Frova* (Milan: Istituto Lombardo, 1965); Yosef Porath, “Theatre, Racing, and Athletic Installations in Caesarea,” *Qadmoniot* 125 (2003): 27–31 (Hebrew). Shuni: Eli Shenhav, “Shuni/Maiamas,” *Qadmoniot* 23 (1990): 58–62 (Hebrew). Dor: Arthur Segal, *Theaters in Roman Palestine and Provincia Arabia* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 50–51. Antipatris: Moshe Kochavi, *Aphek-Antipatris: Five Thousand Years of History* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1989), 103–109 (Hebrew). Tiberias: Walid Atrash, “The Roman Theater at Tiberias,” *Qadmoniot* 144 (2012): 79–88 (Hebrew). Sepphoris: Leroy Waterman, *Preliminary Report of the University of Michigan Excavations at Sepphoris, Palestine, in 1931* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1937), 6–12; Ehud Netzer and Zeev Weiss, *Zippori* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 14–17; Zeev Weiss and Ehud Netzer, “The Hebrew University Excavations at Sepphoris,” *Qadmoniot* 113 (1997): 7–8 (Hebrew). Neapolis: Yitzhak Magen, *Flavia Neapolis: Shechem in the Roman Period*, Judea and Samaria Publications 11, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Staff Officer of Archaeology—Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria, Israel Antiquities Authority, 2009), 95–147. Samaria: John W. Crowfoot, Kathleen M. Kenyon, and Eleazar L. Sukenik, *The Buildings of Samaria*, Samaria-Sebaste 1 (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1942), 57–61; Fawzi Zayadine, “Samaria-Sebaste: Clearance and Excavations (October 1965–June 1967),” *ADAJ* 12–13 (1967–68): 77–80; Zayadine, “Fouilles classiques récentes en Jordanie,” *Les annales archéologiques arabes syriennes* 21 (1971): 149–150. Scythopolis: Shimon Applebaum, “The Roman Theatre of Scythopolis,” *SCI* 4 (1978): 77–103; Asher Ovadia and Carla Gomez de Silva, “Some Notes on the Roman Theatre of Beth-Shean (Scythopolis),” *SCI* 6 (1981–1982): 85–97; Walid Atrash, “Entertainment Structures in the Civic Center of

- Nysa-Scythopolis (Beth-She'an) during the Roman and Byzantine Periods" (PhD diss., University of Haifa, 2006) (Hebrew); Gabriel Mazor and Arfan Najjar, *Nysa-Scythopolis: The Caesareum and the Odeum*, Israel Antiquities Authority Reports 33 (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2007), 21–70, 193–206. Jericho: Ehud Netzer, *Hasmonean and Herodian Palaces at Jericho: Final Reports of the 1973–1987 Excavations*, vol. 2, *Stratigraphy and Architecture: The Coins* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2004), 195–225.
2. Personal communication. Colin Henderson and Eric G. Turner, eds., *Catalogue of the Greek Papyri in the John Rylands Library, Manchester*, vol. 4, *Documents of the Ptolemaic, Roman, and Byzantine Periods* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1952), 117–124, no. 627, lines 212–222. It is possible that a theater already stood in the city in the first century CE and that Apelles, an actor of tragedy from Ascalon (see Chap. 1) participated in the performances held there; see Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 203–205, trans. Francis H. Colson, vol. 10, LCL 379 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 105–107.
 3. Zeev Weiss, "Games and Spectacles in Ancient Gaza: Performances for the Masses Held in Buildings Now Lost," in *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*, ed. Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Arieh Kofsky, Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 24–32.
 4. Jacob Pinkerfeld, "Two Fragments of a Marble Door from Jaffa," *Atiqot* 1 (1955): 89–94. Such depictions in Greek and Roman art portray an actor or playwright; see Margarete Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater*, 2nd rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 82–83, 88–90.
 5. Ronny Reich and Ya'akov Billig, "A Group of Theatre Seats Discovered near the Southwestern Corner of the Temple Mount," *IEJ* 50 (2000): 175–184. Josephus, *Ant.* 15.268–273; *Chronicon Paschale* 1, ed. Ludwig A. Dindorf, CSHB 14 (Bonn: E. Weber, 1832), 474.
 6. Hippos: Arthur Segal, "The Odeion Excavated in Hippos-Sussita," *Études et Travaux* 25 (2012): 358–369. Gadara and Ḥammāt Gader: Thomas M. Weber, *Gadara-Umm Qēs*, vol. 1, *Gadara Decapolitana. Untersuchungen zur Topographie, Geschichte, Architektur und der Bildenden Kunst einer "Polis Hellenis" im Ostjordanland*, Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins 30 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), 134–138, 337–343, 388. Abila: W. Harold Mare, "Abila of the Decapolis in the Roman Period: A Time of Revitalization and Expansion," *SHAJ* 7 (2001): 502; John D. Wineland, *Ancient Abila: An Archaeological History*, B.A.R. International Series 989 (Oxford: Hadrian Books, 2001), 35–37. Capitolias: Ahmad J. al-Shami, "A New Discovery at Bayt Rās/Capitolias-Irbid," *ADAJ* 49 (2005): 509–519. Pella: Anthony W. McNicoll, Robert H. Smith, and J. Basil Hennessy, *Pella in Jordan*, 2 vols. (Canberra: Australia National Gallery, 1982), 1:77–82; Robert H. Smith and Leslie P. Day, *Pella of the Decapolis*, vol. 2, *Final Report on the College of Wooster Excavations in Area IX, the Civic Complex, 1979–1985* (Wooster, OH: College of Wooster, 1989), 20–28. Dion: Gottlieb Schumacher, "Unsere Arbeiten im

- Ostjordanland," *ZDPV* 37 (1914): 125. Gerasa and Birketein: Frank Sear, "The South Theatre at Jarash: 1994 Campaign," *ADAJ* 40 (1996): 217–230; Frank Sear and Andrew Hutson, "Reconstructing the South Theatre at Jerash," *ANES* 37 (2000): 3–27; Sear and Hutson, "The South Theatre at Jarash: 1996 Campaign," *SHAJ* 8 (2004): 389–397; John D. Stewart, "The Jerash North Theatre: Architecture and Archaeology," in *Jerash Archaeological Project, 1981–1983*, vol. 1, ed. Fawzi Zayadine (Amman: Department of Antiquities of Jordan, 1986), 206–229; Jacques Seigne and Sandrine Agusta-Boularot, "Le théâtre nord de Gerasa/Jerash (Jordanie): Fonctions et chronologie," *TOHOI* 12–13 (2005): 339–357; Chester C. McCown, "The Festival Theater at the Birketein," in *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis*, ed. Carl H. Kraeling (New Haven, CT: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1938), 159–167. Philadelphia: Fawzi el-Fakharani, "Das Theater von Amman in Jordanien," *AA* 90, no. 3 (1975): 377–403; Segal, *Theaters*, 85–87. Canatha: Klaus S. Freyberger, "Das Theater in Kanatha: Funktion und Bedeutung," *Antigüedad y Cristianismo* 21 (2004): 13–32. Damascus: Freyberger, "The Theatre of Herod the Great in Damascus: Chronology, Function and Significance," in *Bayt al-'Aqqad: The History and Restoration of a House in Old Damascus*, ed. Peder Mortensen, Proceedings of the Danish Institute in Damascus 4 (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2005), 181–210.
7. Bostra: Helga Finsen, *Le levé du théâtre romain à Bostra, Syrie*, *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici*, Supplement 6 (Copenhagen: Einar Munksgaard, 1972). Philippopolis: Pierre Coupel and Edmond Frézouls, *Le théâtre de Philippopolis en Arabie*, *Bibliothèque archéologique et historique* 63 (Paris: Geuthner, 1956). Adraha: Edmond Frézouls, "Les édifices des spectacles en Syrie," in *Archéologie et Histoire de la Syrie*, vol. 2, ed. Jean-Marie Dentzer and Winfried Orthmann, *Schriften zur Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* 1 (Saarbrücker: Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag, 1989), 399–400. Dionysias (Suweida): Howard C. Butler, *Ancient Architecture in Syria*, Publications of the Princeton University Archeological Expeditions to Syria in 1904–1905 and 1909, Division 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1907), 355. Maximianopolis: William H. Waddington, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie* (Paris: F. Didot, 1870; repr., Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1968), no. 2136.
 8. Philip C. Hammond, *The Excavation of the Main Theater at Petra, 1961–1962: Final Report*, *Colt Archaeological Institute Publications* (London: B. Quaritch, 1965); Segal, *Theaters*, 91–93; Martha Sharp Joukowsky, "Brown University 1997 Excavations at the Petra Great Temple," *ADAJ* 42 (1998): 300–308; Joukowsky, "Challenges in the Field: The Brown University 2005 Petra Great Temple Excavations," *ADAJ* 50 (2006): 368–371; Joukowsky, "Surprises at the Petra Great Temple: A Retrospective," *SHAJ* 10 (2009): 299–303. Sabra: Manfred Lindner, "An Archaeological Survey of the Theater Mount and Catchwater Regulation System at Sabra, South of Petra, 1980," *ADAJ* 26 (1982): 231–242; Manfred Lindner and John P. Zeitler, "Sabra: Entdeckung, Erforschung und Siedlungsgeschichte einer antiken Oasenstadt bei Petra (Jordanien)," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 44–45 (1997–1998):

- 547–548. Elusa: Avraham Negev, “Excavations at Elusa in 1980,” *Qadmoniot* 55–56 (1982): 122–124 (Hebrew); Haim Goldfus and Peter Fabian, “Elusa—1997,” *ESI* 111 (2000): 93*–94*. Sahr: Segal, *Theaters*, 38–39.
9. John H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1986), 537.
 10. Caesarea: *ibid.*, 477–491; Yosef Porath, “Herod’s ‘Amphitheatre’ at Caesarea: A Multipurpose Entertainment Building,” in *The Roman and Byzantine Near East: Some Recent Archaeological Research*, ed. John H. Humphrey, Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 14 (Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1995), 15–27; Porath, “Theatre, Racing, and Athletic Installations,” 31–39; Joseph Patrich, “The *Carceres* of the Herodian Hippodrome/Stadium at Caesarea Maritima and the Connections with the Circus Maximus,” *JRA* 14 (2001): 269–283. Neapolis: Magen, *Flavia Neapolis*, 151–188. Scythopolis: Yoram Tsafrir and Gideon Foerster, “Urbanism at Scythopolis–Beth Shean in the Fourth to Seventh Centuries,” *DOP* 51 (1997): 99, 133–134. Jericho: Netzer, *Hasmonean and Herodian Palaces*, 195–225. Gerasa: Antoni A. Ostrasz, “The Hippodrome of Gerasa: A Report on Excavations and Research 1982–1987,” *Syria* 66 (1989): 51–77; Ostrasz, “The Excavation and Restoration of the Hippodrome at Jerash: A Synopsis,” *ADAJ* 35 (1991): 237–250; Ina Kehrberg and Antoni A. Ostrasz, “A History of Occupational Changes at the Site of the Hippodrome of Gerasa,” *SHAJ* 6 (1997): 167–173. Gadara: Weber, *Gadara-Umm Q̣ēs*, 138–139, 358–359. Bostra: Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 492–495; Jacqueline Dentzer-Feydy, “Le cirque (‘hippodrome’),” in *Bosra aux portes de l’Arabie*, ed. Jacqueline Dentzer-Feydy et al., Guides archéologiques de l’Institut français du Proche-Orient 5 (Beirut: Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2007), 205–206. Tiberias: Moshe Hartal, “Tiberias, Galei Kinneret,” *ESI* 120 (2008): www.hadashot-esi.org.il/report_detail_eng.asp?id=773&mag_id=114 (accessed October 15, 2012). Samaria: Crowfoot, Kenyon, and Sukenik, *Buildings of Samaria*, 41–49.
 11. Arthur Segal and Michael Eisenberg, “Hippos-Sussita of the Decapolis: First Five Years of Excavations,” *Qadmoniot* 129 (2005): 20 (Hebrew).
 12. Jerusalem: *Ant.* 17.254–255; *War* 2.43–44. Tarichaeae: *War* 2.598; *Life* 132–140. Based on a reinterpretation of two phrases cited in the seventh-century CE *Chronicon Pascha* referring to certain buildings that existed in the city, a hippodrome may have stood in Aelia Capitolina, see *Chronicon Paschale* 1, ed. Dindorf, 474; Joseph Patrich, “On the Lost Circus of Aelia Capitolina,” *SCI* 21 (2002): 173–188.
 13. *Ant.* 13.389; Edhem Bey, “Fouilles de Tralles (1902–1903),” *BCH* 28 (1904), 87–89. Findings of a survey reveal that the Hellenistic hippodrome lay north of the city; see Dorothee Sack, *Damaskus: Entwicklung und Struktur einer orientalistisch-islamischen Stadt*, *Damaszener Forschungen* 1 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1989), 11.
 14. Carl Wessely, *Corpus Papyrorum Hermopolitanorum (CPH)* (Leipzig: E. Avenarius, 1905; Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1965), 5.1, no. 70; *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium* 32, trans. and comm. Jean Rougé (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1966), 166.

15. Jerome, *Vita Hilarionis* 20 (PL 23, 36–38); see also Weiss, “Games and Spectacles in Ancient Gaza,” 32–35.
16. Aurelius Septimius Irenaeus from Laodicea won the boxing and running competitions in Ascalon three times; *CIG* 4472. On the wrestlers of Ascalon, see Rougé, *Expositio Totius Mundi* 32, 166.
17. Mimi Lavi, “Monologue of an Amateur Collector,” in *Ashkelon: 4,000 and Forty More Years*, vol. 1, ed. Naphtali Arbel (Tel Aviv: Graphor Daftel, 1990), 248 (Hebrew).
18. M. Aelius Aurelius Menander from Aphrodisias was the victor in the *pankration* held in Paneas in the second century CE; see Waddington, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, no. 1620; Luigi Moretti, *Iscrizioni agonistiche greche* (Rome: A. Signorelli, 1953), no. 72. The participation of local athletes from Paneas in contests in Asia Minor attests indirectly to the existence of such games in their city; see Louis Robert, “Inscriptions de Didymes et de Milet (1),” *Hellenica* 11–12 (1960): 440–446.
19. Caesarea: Adolph Reifenberg, “Caesarea: A Study in the Decline of a Town,” *IEJ* 1 (1951): 25–26; Duane W. Roller, “The Wilfred Laurier University Survey of North-eastern Caesarea Maritima,” *Levant* 14 (1982): 90–103. Eleutheropolis: Amos Kloner and Alain Hübsch, “The Roman Amphitheater of Bet Guvrin: A Preliminary Report on the 1992, 1993, and 1994 Seasons,” *Atiqot* 30 (1996): 85–106. Legio: Gottlieb Schumacher, *Tell el-Mutesellim: Report of the Excavations Conducted from 1903 to 1905*, vol. 1, *Report of the Finds: A. Text* (Leipzig: Haupt, 1908), 173–175. The oval shape of the building, as ascertained from Schumacher’s survey, its proximity to the legion’s camp, and the fact that it is located outside of Maximianopolis’s territory suggest that this was an amphitheater, and not a theater as suggested by Segal; see Segal, *Theaters*, 52–53. Bostra: Ryad al-Mougdad, Pierre-Marie Blanc, and Jean-Marie Dentzer, “Un amphithéâtre à Bostra?” *Syria* 67 (1990): 201–204.
20. Neapolis: Magen, *Flavia Neapolis*, 191–231. Caesarea: Porath, “Theatre, Racing, and Athletic Installations,” 37–39. Scythopolis: Tsafir and Foerster, “Urbanism at Scythopolis,” 133–135. Gerasa: Ostrasz, “Hippodrome of Gerasa: A Report,” 73–74.
21. Claudia Bührig, “Das Theater-Tempel-Areal von Gadara/Umm Qais: Struktureller Wandel eines urbanen Raumes,” *Zeitschrift für Orient-Archäologie* 2 (2009): 181–183.
22. Werner Eck, “The Language of Power: Latin in the Inscriptions of Iudaea/Syria Palaestina,” in *Semitic Papyrology in Context: A Climate of Creativity; Papers from a New York University Conference Marking the Retirement of Baruch A. Levine*, ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Culture and History of the Ancient Near East* 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 123–144. The Latin inscriptions from Caesarea, for example, evince the opinions of Hannah M. Cotton and Werner Eck (“A New Inscription from Caesarea Maritima and the Local Elite of Caesarea Maritima,” in *What Athens Has to Do with Jerusalem: Essays on Classical, Jewish, and Early Christian Art and Archaeology in*

- Honor of Gideon Foerster*, ed. Leonard V. Rutgers, Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion 1 [Leuven: Peeters, 2002], 375–391) regarding significant numbers of Latin-speaking settlers in the city after 70 and in the second century CE.
23. Benjamin H. Isaac, *The Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 101–160; Hannah M. Cotton, “The Impact of the Roman Army in the Province of Judaea/Syria Palaestina,” in *The Impact of the Roman Army (200 BC–AD 476): Economic, Social, Political, Religious and Cultural Aspects. Proceedings of the Sixth Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire, Capri, March 29–April 2, 2005*, ed. Lukas de Blois and Elio Lo Cascio (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 393–407. On the connection between the army and the construction of amphitheaters in the Western Roman Empire, see Patrick Le Roux, “L’amphithéâtre et le soldat sous l’Empire romain,” in *Spectacula*, vol. 1, *Gladiateurs et amphithéâtres. Actes du colloque tenu à Toulouse et à Lattes les 26–29 mai 1987*, ed. Claude Domergue, Christian Landes, and Jean-Marie Pailler (Paris: Imago; Lattes: Musée archéologique Henri Prades, 1990), 203–215.
 24. Kloner and Hübsch, “Roman Amphitheater of Bet Guvrin,” 103–104. The identification of Bet Guvrin in the Jewish sources with Italy and Rome is indicative of clear Roman elements here on a larger scale than in other cities of Roman Palestine; see Joshua Schwartz, *Jewish Settlement in Judaea: After the Bar-Kochba War until the Arab Conquest, 135–640 CE* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986), 87–89 (Hebrew). According to Cotton, *Legio VI Ferrata* moved to Judaea on the eve of the Second Revolt, and its camp was located in Legio/Lajjun, near Caparcotna; see Hannah M. Cotton, “The Legio VI Ferrata,” in *Les légions de Rome sous le Haut-Empire. Actes du congrès de Lyon (17–19 septembre 1998)*, vol. 1, ed. Yann Le Bohec, Collection du Centre d’études romaines et gallo-romaines, n.s. 20, 27 (Paris: E. de Boccard; Lyon: Centre d’études et de recherches sur l’Occident romain, 2000), 351–357. Evidence of a legionary camp was surveyed in Legio, and artifacts and inscriptions connected to the legion’s units were collected on the outskirts of nearby Kefar ‘Othnay; see Yotam Tepper, “The Roman Legionary Camp at Legio, Israel: Results of an Archaeological Survey and Observations on the Military Presence at the Site,” in *The Late Roman Army in the Near East from Diocletian to the Arab Conquest, Proceedings of a Colloquium Held at Potenza, Acerenza and Matera, Italy (May 2005)*, ed. Ariel Levin and Pietrina Pellegrini, B.A.R. International Series 1717 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007), 57–71; Yotam Tepper and Leah Di Segni, *A Christian Prayer Hall of the Third Century CE at Kefar ‘Othnay (Legio): Excavations at the Megiddo Prison 2005* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2006), 45–53. The presence of legionary emblems on the coins minted at Neapolis might indicate, according to Harl, that the colony was reinforced at the time of Trebonianus Gallus with a contingent of veterans drawn from the *Legio X Fretensis*; see Kenneth W. Harl, “The Coinage of Neapolis in Samaria, A.D. 244–253,” *American Numismatic Society, Museum Notes* 29 (1984): 61–97.
 25. Isaac, *Limits of Empire*, 349–351.

26. The amphitheater at Dura Europos was built at the beginning of the third century CE for the soldiers of the legion stationed in the city; see Michael I. Rostovtzeff et al., eds., *The Excavations at Dura-Europos: Preliminary Report of the Sixth Season of Work* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1936), 68–77. The recently identified amphitheater in Palmyra is also associated with the deployment of Roman troops in the city in third century CE; see Manar Hammad, “Un amphithéâtre à Tadmor-Palmyra?” *Syria* 85 (2008): 339–346.
27. According to Dodge, only twenty-one amphitheaters can be identified in the eastern provinces (including the Balkans) out of the over two hundred permanent amphitheaters known in the Roman world; see Hazel Dodge, “Amphitheaters in the Roman East,” in *Roman Amphitheatres and Spectacula: A 21st Century Perspective, Papers from an International Conference Held at Chester, 16th–18th February 2007*, ed. Tony Wilmott, B.A.R. International Series 1946 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009), 29–45.
28. Louis Robert, *Les gladiateurs dans l’Orient Grec*, Bibliothèque de l’École des Hautes Études: Sciences philologiques et historiques 278 (Paris: E. Champion, 1940; Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1971), 263–266; David Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor, to the End of the Third Century after Christ*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), 1:655–656; Barbara Levick, *Roman Colonies in Southern Asia Minor* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 92–95; 184–192.
29. Katherine E. Welch, *The Roman Amphitheatre: From Its Origins to the Colosseum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 163–185.
30. Jean-Claude Golvin, *L’amphithéâtre romain: Essai sur la théorisation de sa forme et de ses fonctions*, Publications du Centre Pierre Paris 18, 2 vols. (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1988), 1:239–246; Frank Sear, *Roman Theatres: An Architectural Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 43–44. Despite the architectural modifications, theatrical performances continued to be held there together with the gladiatorial combats; see Charlotte Roueché, “Inscriptions and the Late History of the Theatre,” in *Aphrodisias Papers*, vol. 2, ed. Kenan T. Erim and R. R. R. Smith, JRA Supplementary Series 2 (Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1991), 103.
31. Unlike North Africa, for instance, where there were fewer hippodromes and more amphitheaters, but there, as elsewhere in the Roman world, the number of theaters is greatest; see Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 320–321.
32. Gideon Fuks, *Scythopolis: A Greek City in Eretz Israel* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1983, 123–126 (Hebrew).
33. Segal, *Theaters*, 7–15. Magen, following Segal, slightly changes the dates and the relevant buildings that were erected, particularly in the last two stages; see Magen, *Flavia Neapolis*, 138–139.
34. Segal, *Theaters*, 4–7.
35. Pliny, *Letters and Panegyricus* 10.39, trans. Betty Radice, 2 vols., LCL 55 and 59 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1969), 2:213–215.

36. Theaters: *Ant.* 15.268; compare *Ant.* 17.254–255; *War* 2.43–44. For the archaeological remains see: Caesarea: Fropa et al., *Scavi di Caesarea Maritima*, 172–173. Jericho: Netzer, *Hasmonean and Herodian Palaces*, 217–218. Hippo-stadium and stadium: Caesarea: *Ant.* 15.341; *War* 1.415. For the archaeological remains, see Porath, “Herod’s ‘Amphitheatre,’” 23. Jericho: *Ant.* 17.175–178, 193; *War* 1.659; see also Netzer, *Hasmonean and Herodian Palaces*, 195–225. Samaria: Crowfoot, Kenyon, and Sukenik, *Buildings of Samaria*, 32–34; Ehud Netzer, *The Architecture of Herod, the Great Builder*, Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 117 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 92–93.
37. *War* 1.422.
38. Theater: Atrash, “Roman Theater at Tiberias,” 80–83. Stadium: *War* 2.618; *Life* 92, 331; and see also Manfred Lämmer, “Griechische Wettkämpfe in Galiläa unter der Herrschaft des Herodes Antipas,” *Kölner Beiträge zur Sportwissenschaft* 5 (1976): 37–67; Weiss, “Josephus and Archaeology,” 390–391. The stadium in Tiberias is mentioned again in the third century CE, attesting to its continued existence over the years; see J ‘Eruvin 5 1, 22b; and see also Saul Lieberman, “Emendations on the Jerushalmy (c),” *Tarbiz* 3 (1932): 207–209 (Hebrew).
39. Hammond, *Excavation of the Main Theater*, 62–65. According to McKenzie, the theater should be dated not too early in the first century CE; see Judith S. McKenzie, *The Architecture of Petra*, British Academy Monographs in Archaeology 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 35, 43.
40. *Ant.* 19.335.
41. Canatha: Freyberger, “Das Theater in Kanatha,” 25–27. Scythopolis: Atrash, “Entertainment Structures,” 49–50, 83–85. Gadara: Bühlig, “Das Theater-Tempel,” 173–175. The building in Sabra is dated generally to the first century CE; see Lindner and Zeitler, “Sabra,” 547; Manfred Lindner, “Theater, Theater, Theater . . . Zu Forschungen der naturhistorischen Gesellschaft in Sabra,” *Natur und Mensch* (2006): 75–84.
42. It is possible that a theater stood in the city in the first century CE and that Apelles, an actor of tragedies from Ascalon (see Chap. 1), participated in the performances there; see Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 203–205, trans. Colson, 105–107.
43. *Ant.* 19.343, and see also Daniel R. Schwartz, *Agrippa I: The Last King of Judaea*, Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 23 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), 131–134.
44. Hippos: Segal, “*Odeion*,” 366–368. Gerasa: Jean Pouilloux, “Deux inscriptions au théâtre sud de Gerasa,” *LA* 27 (1977): 246–254; Pouilloux, “Une troisième dédicace au théâtre de Gerasa,” *LA* 29 (1979): 276–278; Sear, “South Theatre at Jarash,” 222. Philadelphia: el-Fakharani, “Das Theater von Amman,” 400–403. Smith assumes that the *odeon* in Pella was founded in 82/83 CE, when the city was flourishing economically as expressed in its local coinage; he nevertheless does not dismiss the possibility that the building could have been founded a bit later; see Smith and Day, *Pella of the Decapolis*, 27–29.

45. Scythopolis: Atrash, "Entertainment Structures," 51, 85–88. Caesarea: Ioannis Malalae, *Chronographia*, 10.46, ed. Ioannes Thurn, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 35 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 197. Such a building was found in the city, though it is dated to the second century CE; see Porath, "Theatre, Racing, and Athletic Installations," 30–31.
46. Sepphoris: Zeev Weiss, "Josephus and Archaeology on the Cities of the Galilee," in *Making History: Josephus and Historical Method*, ed. Zuleika Rodgers, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 110 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 400–404, with references to earlier studies. The *cavea* that was added in this period to the large temple in Petra lent its interior the semblance of a theater; however, its excavators assigned it the function of a *bouleuterion*, *odeon*, or cultic theater; see Joukowsky, "Brown University 1997 Excavations," 313–315; Jacques Seigne, "Compte rendu of M. Sharp Joukowsky, Petra Great Temple, volume I: Brown University Excavations 1993–1997, Providence, Rhode Island (1998)," *TOIIOI* 10 (2000): 507–516.
47. Finsen, *Le levé du théâtre romain*, 1; Jean-Marie Dentzer, Pierre-Marie Blanc, and Thibaud Fournet, "Le développement urbain de Bosra de l'époque nabatéenne à l'époque byzantine: Bilan de recherches françaises, 1981–2002," *Syria* 79 (2002): 143.
48. Neapolis: Magen, *Flavia Neapolis*, 138–139. Philadelphia: Adnan Hadidi, "The Excavation of the Roman Forum at Amman (Philadelphia), 1964–1967," *ADAJ* 19 (1974): 89–91. Scythopolis: Mazor and Najjar, *Nysa-Scythopolis*, 181; Jerusalem: *Chronicon Paschale* 1, ed. Dindorf, 474.
49. Neapolis: Magen, *Flavia Neapolis*, 181–184. Caesarea: Personal communication.
50. Gerasa (north): Stewart, "Jerash North Theatre," 229. Seigne and Augusta-Boularot ("Le théâtre nord de Gerasa/Jerash," 348–350) raise the possibility that the building may have been founded in 135/140 CE and was first used as a *bouleuterion* when the city was being rebuilt. Caesarea: Frova et al., *Scavi di Caesarea Maritima*, 176.
51. Scythopolis: Tsafir and Foerster, "Urbanism at Scythopolis," 99. Caesarea: Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 480; Porath, "Theatre, Racing, and Athletic Installations," 41–42. Gerasa: Ostrasz, "Excavation and Restoration of the Hippodrome," 240–241; Eleutheropolis: Kloner and Hübsch, "Roman Amphitheater of Bet Guvrin," 101–103.
52. Hirschfeld maintains that the theater at Hammat Gader was built at the same time as the baths, in the mid-second century CE, perhaps during the reign of the emperor Antoninus Pius; see Yizhar Hirschfeld, "The History and Town-Plan of Ancient Hammat Gader," *ZDPV* 103 (1987): 103–104, 111–112; Weber (*Gadara-Umm Qes*, 358) dates it without pinpointing the second or third century CE. Capitoliās: al-Shami, "New Discovery at Bayt Rās / Capitoliās-Irbid," 512. Abila: Mare, "Abila of the Decapolis," 502. Dor: Segal, *Theaters*, 51. Bostra: Al-Mougdad, Blanc, and Dentzer, "Un amphithéâtre à Bostra?" 204; Legio: Schumacher, *Tell el-Mutesellim*, 173–175.

53. Gadara: Weber, *Gadara-Umm Qēs*, 135, 343. Scythopolis: Atrash, "Entertainment Structures," 68. Samaria: Crowfoot, Kenyon, and Sukenik, *Buildings of Samaria*, 36, 61. Elusa: Goldfus and Fabian, "Elusa—1997," 93*–94*. Shuni: Shenhav, "Shuni/Maiamas," 60. Kochavi (*Aphek-Antipatris*, 109) maintains that the theater in Antipatris is to be dated to the mid-fourth century CE, but such a date seems too late. The style of several architectural decorations found there indicates a more plausible Severan date. Birketein: McCown, "Festival Theater," 167. Hippodrome in Gadara: Susanne Kerner and Adolf Hoffmann, "Gadara-Umm Qeis: Preliminary Report on the 1991 and 1992 Seasons," *ADAJ* 37 (1993): 360.
54. Scythopolis: Atrash, "Entertainment Structures," 52–53. Gerasa: Stewart, "Jerash North Theatre," 229. Augusta-Boularot and Seigne maintain that these modifications, or part of them, were made in 165/166, when the *bouleuterion* was converted into an *odeon*; see Sandrine Augusta-Boularot and Jacques Seigne, "La fonction des odéons dans les provinces orientales de l'empire: L'exemple de Gerasa de la Décapole (Jordanie)," in *Théorie et pratique de l'architecture romaine: La norme et l'expérimentation. Études offertes à Pierre Gros*, ed. Xavier Lafon and Gilles Sauron (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 2005), 297–310. Bostra: Klaus S. Freyberger, "Zur Datierung des Theaters in Bosra," *Dam* 3 (1988): 17–26; in another article on the urban development of Bostra, Freyberger notes that public building is dated primarily to the time of the Severan dynasty and continued throughout the entire third century; see Freyberger, "Einige Beobachtungen zur städtebaulichen Entwicklung der römischen Bostra," *Dam* 4 (1989), 45–60.
55. Philippopolis: Coupel and Frézouls, *Le théâtre de Philippopolis*, 1. Bostra: Dentzer-Feydy, "Le cirque ('hippodrome')," 206.
56. Scythopolis: Atrash, "Entertainment Structures," 89–126. Caesarea: Frova et al., *Scavi di Caesarea Maritima*, 175–186. Canatha: Freyberger, "Das Theater in Kanatha," 17–27. Gerasa: Stewart, "The Jerash North Theatre," 227–229. Gadara: Kerner and Hoffmann, "Gadara-Umm Qeis," 360.
57. Gerasa: Sear, "South Theatre at Jarash," 222. Bostra: Freyberger, "Zur Datierung des Theaters in Bosra," 17–26. Eleutheropolis: Kloner and Hübsch, "The Roman Amphitheater of Bet Guvrin," 103.
58. Edmond Frézouls, "Recherches sur les théâtres de l'orient syrien (2)," *Syria* 38 (1961): 54–60; Segal, *Theaters*, 5.
59. Menahem Stern, "The Province of Judaea," in *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural, and Religious Life and Institutions*, vol. 1, ed. Shmuel Safrai and Menahem Stern (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974), 308–324; Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 B.C.–A.D. 337* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 43–69.
60. Arnold H. M. Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 277–281. Graf contends that the spread of Greek civic life in ancient Palestine and the Decapolis became visible in the Augustan era; however, urbanization did not become prevalent until the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian; see

- David F. Graf, “Hellenisation and the Decapolis,” *ARAM* 4 (1992), 26–28. On the nature of urban building and its sources of funding, see Maurice Sartre, *The Middle East under Rome* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 160–183.
61. Joseph Geiger, “Local Patriotism in the Hellenistic Cities of Palestine,” in *Greece and Rome in Eretz Israel*, ed. Aryeh Kasher, Uriel Rappaport, and Gideon Fuks (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi and Israel Exploration Society, 1990), 141–150. Gerasa was a highly developed city, with the construction of its street network and several public buildings largely completed by the late first century CE; see Carl H. Kraeling, ed., *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis* (New Haven, CT: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1938), 45–56; Jacques Seigne, “Jérash romaine et byzantine: Développement urbain d’une ville provinciale orientale,” *SHAJ* 4 (1992): 331–341; Seigne, “Gerasa-Jerasch: Stadt der 1000 Säulen,” in *Gadara-Gerasa und die Dekapolis*, Sonderbände der antiken Welt, Zaberns Bildbände zur Archäologie (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 2002), 6–22. Several public buildings are known in first-century Scythopolis, but it was only in the second century CE that the city was fully developed, with the construction of a major thoroughfare in the Lower City and various public buildings composing its new civic center; see Gabriel Mazor and Rachel Bar-Nathan, “Scythopolis: Capital of *Palaestina Secunda*,” *Qadmoniot* 107–108 (1994): 117–134 (Hebrew); Tsafir and Foerster, “Urbanism at Scythopolis,” 85–99.
 62. Michael I. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, 2 vols., 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), 1:157–158, 406–407; Ernest Will, “Les villes de la Syrie à l’époque hellénistique et romaine,” in *Archéologie et Histoire de la Syrie*, vol. 2, ed. Jean-Marie Dentzer and Winfried Orthmann, *Schriften zur vorderasiatischen Archäologie* 1 (Saarbrücker: Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag, 1989), 223–250.
 63. Sifra, Aḥarei Mot, Parashah 9, 13, 9, ed. Isaac H. Weiss (New York: Ohm, 1947), 86.
 64. Avot de Rabbi Nathan, A, 28, ed. Schneur Z. Schechter (New York: Feldheim, 1945), 87.
 65. T ‘Avodah Zarah 2, 5 and 7, ed. Moshe S. Zuckerman (Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrman, 1937), 462. See also what Rabbi Meir has to say in Avot de Rabbi Nathan, A, 21, ed. Schechter, 74: “R. Meir says, ‘What is the meaning of the statement, *sat in the seat of the scornful*?’ This refers to the theaters and circuses of the gentiles, in which people are sentenced to death.”
 66. In Bostra, for example, a monumental gate was erected by Rabel II; see Jean-Marie Dentzer, “Sondage près de l’arc nabatéen à Bosrā,” *Berytus* 32 (1984): 163–174; Jean-Marie Dentzer, Jacqueline Dentzer-Feydy, and Pierre-Marie Blanc, “Buṣrā dans la perspective par millénaires: la Buṣrā nabatéenne,” *SHAJ* 7 (2001): 457–468. Bowersock maintains that Nabataean construction in the last quarter of the first century CE was financed by the local rulers, but it was, in fact, a Roman initiative that was part of a wider plan; see Glen W. Bowersock, “Syria under Vespasian,” *JRS* 63 (1973):

- 133–140. Isaac, who asserts that Roman rule had nothing to do with public building in the provinces, claims that this was only a local initiative; see Isaac, *Limits of Empire*, 344–345.
67. Hammond, *Excavation of the Main Theater*, 55–65. Sabra: Lindner, “Archaeological Survey of the Theater Mount,” 241; Lindner and Zeitler, “Sabra,” 547.
68. Stewart, “Jerash North Theatre,” 206–207. The terrace and west theater at Gadara were constructed along the natural slope, adjacent to the *cardo*, while conceptualizing one coherent plan and axial layout for the city; see Robert L. J. J. Guinée and Nicole F. Mulder, “Gadara: The Terrace, Theatre and *Cardo* Quarter in the Roman Period; Architectural Design Integrated in the Landscape: The Design of the West Theatre,” *SHAJ* 6 (1997), 317–322.
69. William L. MacDonald, *The Architecture of the Roman Empire*, vol. 2, Yale Publications in the History of Art 35 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 5–31.
70. The theaters of Neapolis and Gaza are depicted on the Madaba map on the outskirts of the city and are aligned with the city wall; see Magen, *Flavia Neapolis*, 96–100; Weiss, “Games and Spectacles in Ancient Gaza,” 24–28.
71. Arthur Segal, *Town Planning and Architecture in Provincia Arabia: The Cities along the Via Traiana Nova in the 1st–3rd Centuries C.E.*, B.A.R. International Series 419 (Oxford: B.A.R., 1988), 7–8; Atrash, “Entertainment Structures,” 151–157.
72. Inge Nielsen, *Cultic Theatres and Ritual Drama: A Study in Regional Development and Religious Interchange between East and West in Antiquity*, Aarhus Studies in Mediterranean Antiquity 4 (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2002), 245–250.
73. “The Gate of Campon” is one of the six entrance gates to Scythopolis. In the halakhic inscription incorporated into the mosaic floor discovered in the narthex of the synagogue at Rehov, these gates serve as points of reference for defining the city’s boundaries for all four directions; see Yaakov Sussmann, “A Halakhic Inscription from the Beth-Shean Valley: A Preliminary Survey,” *Tarbiz* 43 (1974): 114–119 (Hebrew). The city’s hippodrome is called *campon* in rabbinic literature, and the gate near it in Scythopolis was named after it; see Zeev Weiss, “New Light on the Rehov Inscription: Identifying ‘The Gate of Campon’ at Bet Shean,” in *What Athens Has to Do with Jerusalem: Essays on Classical, Jewish, and Early Christian Art and Archaeology in Honor of Gideon Foerster*, ed. Leonard V. Rutgers, Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion 1 (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 211–233.
74. J ‘Eruvin 5 1, 22b; see also Lieberman, “Emendations,” 207–209; Moshe Schwabe, “The History of Tiberias,” in *Iohannis Lewy Volume*, ed. Moshe Schwabe and Joshua Gutman (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1949), 238–242 (Hebrew). The stadium is mentioned another time, in J Kil’aim 9 4, 32c–d (“R. Bar Qaria and R. Eleazar were strolling in the stadium”) and in a parallel source (J Ketubot 12 3, 35b).
75. Deuteronomy Rabbah 19, ed. Saul Lieberman (Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrmann, 1940), 18. In Lieberman’s notes he associates this with another sermon of R.

- Meir (‘Avot de Rabbi Nathan, A, 21, ed. Schechter, 74), from which we learn that the trial was conducted in the theater. However, it appears that this sermon is discussing three different buildings relating to Roman presence in Palestine. The *bima* that is mentioned, along the palace and the theater, refer to the municipal basilica, where trials were held in Roman cities—a fact that was also familiar to the rabbis; see Genesis Rabbah 68, 12, ed. Yehudah Theodor and Hanoah Albeck (Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1965), 788. For a discussion of the basilica and its occurrences in talmudic sources, see Daniel Sperber, *The City in Roman Palestine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 73–76.
76. The colonnaded street that served as the city’s marketplace is called a *plateia* in talmudic literature; see, for example, T Shabbat 10, 1, ed. Saul Lieberman (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1955–1988), 41. Shops selling their wares were located alongside the main thoroughfare; see Genesis Rabbah 84, 5, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 1005.
 77. Tanḥuma, Ḥayyei Sarah, 3; Exodus Rabbah, Bo, 15, 22 (Vilna).
 78. Public buildings and private homes in the city served as identifying markers for the inhabitants in their everyday life, as is evident, for example, in Oslo inv, Papyrus 1621, from the third century CE, which contains detailed instructions on how to reach a certain place in Alexandria; see Martha H. de Kat Eliassen, “Three Papyri from the Oslo Collections,” *Symbolae Osloenses* 56 (1981): 99–104; Robert W. Daniel, “Through Straying Streets: A Note on κημαρία-Texts,” *ZPE* 54 (1984): 85–86.
 79. J ‘Eruvin 5 1, 22b. The midrash reads: “He issued a decree and said: ‘everyone will go out to the *campon*’” (Song of Songs Rabbah 2, 30; 4, 24; Pesiqta de Rav Kahana 11, 6, ed. B. Mandelbaum [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962], 181 and the textual variants there). It indicates perhaps that the townspeople were ordered to go out to the building that stood outside the city.
 80. For a detailed discussion comparing how theaters and amphitheaters were placed in the Roman city, see Edmond Frézouls, “Les monuments des spectacles dans la ville: Théâtre et amphithéâtre,” in *Spectacula*, vol. 1, *Gladiateurs et amphithéâtres. Actes du colloque tenu à Toulouse et à Lattes les 26–29 mai 1987*, ed. Claude Domergue, Christian Landes, and Jean-Marie Pailler (Paris: Imago; Lattes: Musée archéologique Henri Prades, 1990), 77–92.
 81. Seneca emphasizes the danger of mingling with the crowds that watched the amphitheatrical performances; see Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales* 7, trans. Richard M. Gummere, vol. 1, LCL 75 (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 28–32. According to Martial, the crowds disrupted the peace; see Martial, *De Spectaculis, Epigrammata* 4, ed. Walter C. A. Ker, LCL, vol. 1, rev. ed. (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968).
 82. Segal (*Theaters*, 26–29) refers to them simply as theaters; Mazor and Najjar (*Nysa-Scythopolis*, 207–222) identify them as *odea* (concert halls). For a general discussion of the various terms and types of the *odea*, see Reudiger Meinel, *Das Odeion*:

- Untersuchungen an überdachten antiken Theatergebäuden*, Europäische Hochschulschriften 28, Kunstgeschichte 11 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter D. Lang, 1980), 24–36, 204–334.
83. Southern theater: Pouilloux, “Deux inscriptions,” 246–254; C. Bradford Welles, “The Inscriptions,” in *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis* (New Haven, CT: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1938), no. 192. Northern Theater: Sandrine Agusta-Boularot and Jacques Seigne, “La vie civique de Gerasa de la Décapole,” *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome. Antiquité* 116 (2004): 484–514.
 84. Henderson and Turner, *Catalogue*, 117–124, no. 627, lines 212–222.
 85. Waddington, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, no. 2341.
 86. Avraham Negev, *The Greek Inscriptions from the Negev*, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Collectio Minor 25 (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing, 1981), 73–76.
 87. According to Bowsher these buildings could accommodate the six hundred members of the *boule*, and therefore he maintains that in the Decapolis they served as *bouleuteria*; see Julian M. C. Bowsher, “Civic Organization within the Decapolis,” *ARAM* 4 (1992): 275–278; Jean-Ch. Balty, “Curie et bouleutérion, nouveaux exemples: Confirmations et problèmes,” in *Théorie et pratique de l'architecture romaine: La norme et l'expérimentation. Études offertes à Pierre Gros*, ed. Xavier Lafon and Gilles Sauron (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 2005), 141–152. Sear, however, emphasizes the interior layout of the building when determining its use either as an *odeon* or a *bouleuterion*; see Sear, *Roman Theatres*, 38–42.
 88. Alexandra Retzliff and Abdel Majeed Mjely, “Seat Inscriptions in the Odeum at Gerasa (Jerash),” *BASOR* 336 (2004): 37–47; Magen, *Flavia Neapolis*, 124–131. The *odeon* in Pella presumably hosted the *bouleuterion* as well; see Smith and Day, *Pella of the Decapolis*, 26–27, 131–134. In addition to its urban political function, the *bouleuterion* in Aphrodisias served as a multipurpose space for musical performances and other forms of entertainment; see Lionel Bier, “The Bouleuterion,” in *Aphrodisias Papers*, vol. 4: *New Research on the City and Its Monuments*, ed. Christopher Ratté and R. R. R. Smith, JRA Supplementary Series 70 Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2008), 145–168.
 89. Vitruvius, *De Architectura* 5.3.1–2, ed. and trans. Frank Granger, 2 vols., LCL 251 and 280 (London: Heinemann, 1931; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).
 90. In general, this method characterizes the construction of other theaters in Syria; see Sear, *Roman Theatres*, 108–109.
 91. El-Fakharani, “Das Theater von Amman,” 387–388. Such temples appear in other provincial theaters; see John A. Hanson, *Roman Theater-Temples*, Princeton Monograph in Art and Archaeology 33 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959).
 92. Vitruvius, *De Architectura* 5.6.4; Finsen, *Le levé du théâtre romain*, plans 2, 5.
 93. Vitruvius, *De Architectura* 5.9.1; Stewart, “Jerash North Theatre,” 206–207. In Caesarea, a semicircular plaza was added behind the theater in the third century CE (Frova et al., *Scavi di Caesarea Maritima*, 155–158).

94. In Caesarea it is 1 meter high, in Bet Shean 1.18 meters, and in Sepphoris and Samaria 75 centimeters.
95. Philadelphia 1.2 meters, Bostra 1.4 meters, and the three theaters in Gerasa 1.5 meters. The height of the podium in the theater in Petra and the stairs descending from it through the wall to the orchestra are designed as in ancient western Palestine; however, this building, together with the Herodian theater in Caesarea, reflects an earlier architectural tradition in the region.
96. Sear, *Roman Theatres*, 5.
97. Rainer Graefe, *Vela Erunt: Die Zeltdächer der römischen Theater und ähnlicher Anlagen* (Mainz am Rhein: P. von Zabern, 1979).
98. Finsen, *Le levé du théâtre romain*, 20, plan 20. For the inscription, see Maurice Sartre, *Bostra*, IGLS 13.1, ed. Louis Jalabert (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1982), 223–224, no. 9168.
99. Stewart, “Jerash North Theatre,” 215–217. Similar post holes were also found in the *cavea* in Scythopolis, where several corbels were found *ex situ*, attesting that here, too, a *velum* was stretched over the heads of the spectators on special occasions.
100. Alexander Sperber, ed., *The Bible in Aramaic*, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 327–328; Samson H. Levey, *The Targum of Ezekiel*, The Aramaic Bible 13 (Wilmington, DE: M. Glazier, 1987), 81–82. For further discussion of the biblical verse, Aramaic translation, and the connection between the two, see Jordan S. Penkower, “The Textual Transmission of Rashi’s Commentary, Kimhi’s Commentary, and the Targum Jonathan on Ezekiel 27:6,” in *Studies in Bible and Exegesis (Presented to Uriel Simon)* 5 (2000): 315–339 (Hebrew).
101. Graefe, *Vela Erunt*, 121–123. Various rabbinic sources indicate a deep knowledge of ship parts, including sails; see Daniel Sperber, *Nautica Talmudica* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University; Leiden: Brill, 1986), 37–51.
102. Vitruvius, *De Architectura* 5.6.2.
103. Frova et al., *Scavi di Caesarea Maritima*, 93–112.
104. A channel in the Herodian theater in Caesarea encircled the orchestra; in Sepphoris, a lead pipe was found that extended in a straight line from the center of the orchestra; and a more sophisticated drainage system was found in Scythopolis; see Frova et al., *Scavi di Caesarea Maritima*, 86–88; Waterman, *Preliminary Report*, 10; Atrash, “Entertainment Structures,” 56.
105. Finsen, *Le levé du théâtre romain*, plan 4; Shenhav, “Shuni/Maiamas,” 60.
106. Scythopolis: Shimon Applebaum et al., “Varia Epigraphica,” *SCI* 4 (1978): 139–140; Baruch Lifshitz, “Notes d’épigraphie grecque,” *ZPE* 6 (1970): 62. Philadelphia: el-Fakharani, “Das Theater von Amman,” 388–389. Pella: Smith and Day, *Pella of the Decapolis*, 29, 119. Caesarea: Frova et al., *Scavi di Caesarea Maritima*, 216.
107. T ‘Avodah Zarah 2, 5, ed. Moshe S. Zuckerman (Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrman, 1937), 462.
108. The height of the podium around the orchestra in the theaters of Asia Minor is as much as 2.15 meters, while in Transjordan it ranges, as noted, between 1.2 and 1.5

- meters. For details about the changes made in the orchestra and on the preparation of the theater in Asia Minor for gladiatorial performances, see Golvin, *L'amphithéâtre romain*, 239–246.
109. Caesarea: Frova et al., *Scavi di Caesarea Maritima*, 95–96, 110–111. Sepphoris: as yet unpublished.
 110. Depictions of a number of figures that took part in offering sacrifices and libations, as well a portrayal of Telamon (Atlant), appeared on some reliefs in Caesarea; in Samaria the reliefs were decorated with shields and geometric patterns; see Frova et al., *Scavi di Caesarea Maritima*, 193–194; Crowfoot, Kenyon, and Sukenik, *Buildings of Samaria*, 59–61.
 111. Sear, *Roman Theatres*, 83–95.
 112. Finsen, *Le levé du théâtre romain*, plan 2.
 113. Sear, “South Theatre at Jarash,” 221–224.
 114. Compared to the rest of the building’s parts, the *scaenae* in the theaters of ancient Palestine and Arabia were largely damaged and in most cases preserved only one story high, whereas the architectural features that adorned the *scaenae frons* were found scattered in the debris around the stage. An analysis of the architectural elements collected over the years has yielded interesting suggestions for reconstructing the *scaenae frons*; see, for example, Atrash, “Entertainment Structures,” 108–121, 135–138; Sear and Andrew, “Reconstructing the South Theatre at Jerash,” 3–27. For additional details regarding the sculptures decorating the *scaenae frons* in the Eastern and Western provinces, see Mary C. Sturgeon, *Sculpture: The Assemblage from the Theater*, Corinth 9/3 (Princeton, NJ: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2004), 57–99.
 115. Granite as well as white and colored marble imported from Asia Minor and North Africa was used mainly in the large theaters in Caesarea, Scythopolis, and Bostra; see, for example, Asher Ovadiah and Yehudit Turnheim, “Peopled” *Scrolls in Roman Architectural Decoration in Israel: The Roman Theater at Beth Shean/Scythopolis*, Supplementi alla RdA 12 (Rome: G. Bretschneider, 1994), esp. 93–101.
 116. The inscription incised on the pedestal of a statue in the southern theater in Gerasa records that it is of Titus Flavius Gerrenus, the first *agónothetês* of the city, and that of Aeschylus, a famous local wrestler, was placed in the theater in Scythopolis; see Gerasa: Welles, “Inscriptions,” no. 192. Scythopolis: personal communication with Gabriel Mazor.
 117. Caesarea: Frova et al., *Scavi di Caesarea Maritima*, 193–216. Shuni: Shenhav, “Shuni/Maiamas,” 61. Neapolis: Magen, *Flavia Neapolis*, 119–120. Philadelphia: el-Fakharani, “Das Theater von Amman,” 398–400; Weber, *Gadara-Umm Qēs*, 505–506 (D2–D3), 509–510 (D7–D9). Petra: *ibid.*, 519 (G1), 521–523 (G8, G10–11).
 118. Leviticus Rabbah 34, 3, ed. Mordechai Margulies (Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1953–1960), 775–777; see also Nahum N. Glatzer, *Hillel the Elder: The Emergence of Classical Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1966), 36–37.

119. Jerzy Kolendo (Varsovie), “La répartition des places aux spectacles et la stratification sociale dans l’empire romain,” *Ktema* 6 (1981): 301–315; David B. Small, “Social Correlation to the Greek Cavea in the Roman Period,” in *Roman Architecture in the Greek World*, ed. Sarah Macready and Frederick Hugh Thompson (London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 1987), 85–93. Significant evidence for seating arrangements was found, for example, in the three auditoria known in Aphrodisias; see Charlotte Roueché, *Performers and Partisans at Aphrodisias in the Roman and Late Roman Periods: A Study Based on Inscriptions from the Current Excavations at Aphrodisias in Caria*, Journal of Roman Studies Monographs 6 (London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 1993), 84–128.
120. Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 147–153, esp. 151. Rose demonstrates the special arrangements made in three entertainment buildings in Rome to ensure the free movement of the masses, the circulation of the populace according to social position, and the provision of amenities for the spectators; see Peter Rose, “Spectators and Spectator Comfort in Roman Entertainment Buildings: A Study in Functional Design,” *PBSR* 73 (2005): 99–130.
121. Ecclesiastes Rabbah 12, 5.
122. For a comprehensive study of the law and its implications in Rome, see Elizabeth Rawson, “Discrimina Ordinum: The Lex Julia Theatralis,” *PBSR* 55 (1987): 83–114.
123. Magen, *Flavia Neapolis*, 124–131.
124. Retzleff and Mjely, “Seat Inscriptions,” 37–47; Augusta-Boularot and Seigne, “La vie civique,” 523–551. Reserving theater seats for the tribes is known elsewhere in the Roman East; see Kolendo (Varsovie), “La répartition des places aux spectacles,” 307–308.
125. Smith and Day, *Pella of the Decapolis*, 131–134.
126. Hannah Cotton et al., *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae (CIIP)*, vol. 1, part 2, *Jerusalem* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 72–74, no. 771.
127. Sartre, *Bostra*, 220–224, nos. 9156–9168. A fragment of another inscription, in Nabataean, discovered in the theater in Bostra, mentions a reserved place for someone whose name has not been preserved: “This is the reserved place of . . .”; see Enno Littmann, *Semitic Inscriptions*, section A: *Nabataean Inscriptions*, Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria in 1904–1905 and 1909, Division 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1914), 60, no. 73.
128. On the *collegia* in the Roman East and reserved places for them in the theater, see Onno M. van Nijf, *The Civic World of Professional Associations in the Roman East*, Dutch Monographs on Ancient History and Archaeology 17 (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1997), 209–240.
129. Walter Ameling et al., *CIIP*, vol. 2, *Caesarea and the Middle Coast* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 369–370, no. 1417.
130. According to Onno M. van Nijf, seats allocated within the theater for private associations varied considerably in every city. At times they were located in marginal

- seats, and in others, positioned in fairly prominent locations, among the seats reserved for important people serving in the city's municipality and other institutions; see van Nijf, *Civic World*, 234–240.
131. See Edmond Frézouls, “Recherches sur les théâtres de l’orient syrien (1),” *Syria* 36 (1959): 203–227; Frézouls, “Recherches sur les théâtres de l’orient syrien (2),” 54–86; Frézouls, “Les édifices des spectacles en Syria,” 385–406.
 132. The bulk of his remarks regarding the Roman theater are found in Book 5, chapters 3, 5–6, 8–9. In chapter 7, Vitruvius writes about the Greek theater and certain of its features that differ from those in the Roman building.
 133. Sear, *Roman Theatres*, 27–29; and see attempts to analyze and compare certain buildings in the region with the Vitruvian model: Hammond, *Excavation of the Main Theater*, 25–28; Magen, *Flavia Neapolis*, 131.
 134. David B. Small, “Studies in Roman Theater Design,” *AJA* 87 (1983): 55–68; Frank Sear, “Vitruvius and Roman Theater Design,” *AJA* 94 (1990): 249–253.
 135. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 535–539.
 136. Antoni A. Ostrasz, “The Hippodrome of Gerasa: A Case of the Dichotomy of Art and Building Technology,” *SHAJ* 5 (1995): 185–187; Magen, *Flavia Neapolis*, 176–178.
 137. See, for example, the proposed reconstruction in Gerasa: Ostrasz, “Hippodrome of Gerasa: A Report,” 62–67.
 138. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 483; Porath, “Herod’s ‘Amphitheatre,’” 21.
 139. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 78–83, 87–90.
 140. Porath, “Herod’s ‘Amphitheatre,’” 16–19; Walt Ameling et al., *CIIP*, vol. 2, *Caesarea and the Middle Coast, 1121–2160* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 47–48, no. 1136; Tsafirir and Foerster, “Urbanism at Scythopolis,” 133–134.
 141. Modern literature calls this partition *spina*, but the Greek term *euripus* is preferable as it is used in other ancient references; see Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 175–176.
 142. Porath, “Theatre, Racing, and Athletic Installations,” 34–37.
 143. Antoni A. Ostrasz, “The Excavation and Restoration of the Hippodrome at Jerash: A Synopsis,” *ADAJ* 35 (1991): 239–240. Such stones were also found in the hippodromia of Caesarea and Scythopolis, suggesting that similar barriers, perhaps even simpler in shape, stood along the racecourse; see Yosef Porath, “Herod’s Circus at Caesarea: A Response to J. Patrich (JRA 14, 269–83),” *JRA* 16 (2003): 451–455; Tsafirir and Foerster, “Urbanism at Scythopolis,” 134.
 144. Antoni A. Ostrasz, “Hippodrome of Gerasa: A Case,” 184–187.
 145. Midrash of King Solomon’s Throne and the Hippodrome, ed. Adolph Jellinek, *Bet Ha-midrash*, repr. (Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1967), part 5, 38. These descriptions, according to Perles, were given with the hippodrome of Constantinople in mind, but this conclusion, in light of the various finds from ancient Palestine, is completely unnecessary today; see Joseph Perles, “Thron und Zirkus des königs Salomo,” *MGWJ* 21 (1872): 123. Some maintain that this midrash was redacted

- only in the seventh century or even later; see Evelyne Ville-Patlagean, “Une image de Salomon en basileus byzantin,” *REJ* 121 (1962): 9–33. Even if this midrash were redacted in a late period, it is accepted that the author was influenced by early materials relating to the Roman-Byzantine hippodrome that he preserved in his text.
146. The hippo-stadia of Caesarea, Neapolis, and Gerasa had ten stalls, while the width of the arena in the hippodromes of Bostra and Caesarea (east) enables a reconstruction of twelve stalls; see Patrich, “*Carceres*,” 269–283; Patrich, “Herodian Caesarea: The Urban Space,” in *The World of the Herods*, ed. Nikos Kokkinos (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2007), 116–120; Magen, *Flavia Neapolis*, 153–160; Ostrasz, “Hippodrome of Gerasa: A Report,” 67–70; Ostrasz, “Hippodrome of Gerasa: A Case,” 187–191.
 147. Patrich and Porath disagree on the question of how the charioteers entered the arena in the Herodian hippo-stadium (phase I) at Caesarea. According to Patrich, they started the race in parallel lanes directed toward the *meta prima*, as in Greek-style horse races, whereas Porath argues that they were arranged radially in lanes meeting the projected white line adjacent to the *meta secunda*, as was done in the Roman circus; see Patrich, “Herodian Caesarea” 118–120; Porath, “Herod’s Circus at Caesarea: A Response,” 455.
 148. Ostrasz, “Hippodrome of Gerasa: A Report,” 70; Zbigniew Borkowski, “Inscriptions on Altars from the Hippodrome of Gerasa,” *Syria* 66 (1989): 79–83; Patrich, “*Carceres*,” 278–280.
 149. Antoni A. Ostrasz, “Jerash/Gerasa, Hippodrome,” in Patricia M. Bikai and Deborah Kooring, “Archaeology in Jordan,” *AJA* 99 (1995): 524–527. The existence of towers in the late second-century hippodrome in Gerasa invalidates the view that they had been built only in the Tetrarchic period; see Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 172–174.
 150. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 157–170.
 151. Ostrasz, “Hippodrome of Gerasa: A Report,” 70; Ostrasz, “Hippodrome of Gerasa: A Case,” 189–191.
 152. Clayton M. Lehmann and Kenneth G. Holum, *The Greek and Latin Inscriptions of Caesarea Maritima*, The Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima, Excavation Reports 5 (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2000), 112–114, no. 109; see also Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 483–484, 490–491.
 153. Hekhalot Rabbati 18, 1; see Peter Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 2 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1981), 93, §214.
 154. Two type of buildings are known elsewhere in the Eastern Roman Empire; see Hazel Dodge, “Circuses in the Roman East: A Reappraisal,” in *Le cirque romain et son image*, ed. Jocelyne Nelis-Clément and Jean-Michel Roddaz, Mémoires 20 (Bordeaux: Ausonius; Paris: E. de Boccard, 2008), 133–146.
 155. Carlin A. Barton, *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans: The Gladiator and the Monster* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1993), 11–81. On the Roman

- amphitheater, the origin of its setting, and its monumentality during the empire see David L. Bomgardner, *The Story of the Roman Amphitheatre* (London: Routledge 2000), 61–196; Welch, *Roman Amphitheatre*, 30–162.
156. Caesarea: Reifenberg, “Caesarea,” 25–26; Roller, “The Wilfred Laurier University Survey of Northeastern Caesarea Maritima,” 90–103. Eleutheropolis: Kloner and Hübsch, “Roman Amphitheater of Bet Guvrin,” 85–106. Legio: Schumacher, *Tell el-Mutesellim*, 173–175. Bostra: Al-Mougdad, Blanc, and Dentzer, “Un amphithéâtre à Bostra?” 201–204; Jacqueline Dentzer-Feydy, “L’amphithéâtre,” in *Bosra aux portes de l’Arabie*, ed. Jacqueline Dentzer-Feydy et al., Guides archéologiques de l’Institut français du Proche-Orient 5 (Beirut: Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2007), 207–208.
 157. Bührig, “Das Theater-Tempel,” 181–183. For the evidence from elsewhere, see Golvin, *L’amphithéâtre romain*, 239–246; Welch, *Roman Amphitheatre*, 163–185.
 158. Atrash, “Entertainment Structures,” 92–93. Similar holes for a light screen or railing were found on top of the podium in both theaters in Gerasa; according to Retzleff, these were used to protect whoever used the walkway, at the bottom of the *cavea* above the high podium; see Alexandra G. Retzleff, “The Orchestra Space in Theaters of the Roman and Byzantine Near East” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2001), 112–114.
 159. Neapolis: Magen, *Flavia Neapolis*, 191–231. Scythopolis: Tsafir and Foerster, “Urbanism at Scythopolis,” 133–135. Gerasa: Ostrasz, “Hippodrome of Gerasa: A Report,” 73–74. Caesarea: Porath, “Theatre, Racing, and Athletic Installations,” 37–40.
 160. Similar changes, occurring approximately at the same time, in the mid-fourth century CE, were recognized in the stadium in Aphrodisias and elsewhere; see Katherine E. Welch, “Stadium at Aphrodisias,” *AJA* 102 (1998): 565–569.
 161. Neapolis: Magen, *Flavia Neapolis*, 225. Caesarea: Porath, “Theatre, Racing, and Athletic Installations,” 42. Scythopolis: Tsafir and Foerster, “Urbanism at Scythopolis,” 134. Gerasa: Ostrasz, “Hippodrome of Gerasa: A Report,” 74.
 162. The political and fiscal crisis by the late third century CE, according to Whittow, weakened the *curiae*, and the cities could no longer bear the administrative costs without outside help; see Mark Whittow, “Ruling the Late Roman and Early Byzantine City: A Continuous History,” *Past and Present* 129 (1990): 3–29, esp. 3–12. According to Shatzman, various factors caused the economic and demographic crisis in the late third and early fourth centuries CE; however, the picture is a bit more complex, since evidence shows that the crisis did not strike equally in all places; see Israel Shatzman, “Economic Conditions, Security Problems and the Deployment of the Army in Later Roman Palestine. Part 1: Economy and Population,” in *The Late Roman Army in the Near East from Diocletian to the Arab Conquest: Proceedings of the Colloquium held at Potenza, Acerenza and Matera, Italy (May 2005)*, ed. Ariel S. Lewin and Pietrina Pellegrini, B.A.R. International Series 1717 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007), 153–200.

163. Joseph Patrich, “The Martyrs of Caesarea: The Urban Context,” *LA* 52 (2002): 321–346. Mitchell maintains that public buildings were demolished in the mid-third century CE to provide building materials for fortifications in light of outside threats; see Stephen Mitchell, “Festivals, Games, and Civic Life in Roman Asia Minor,” *JRS* 80 (1990): 191.
164. Ostrasz, “Hippodrome of Gerasa: A Report,” 73.
165. Ameling et al., *CIIP*, 320–321, nos. 1361–1362.
166. Kloner and Hübsch, “Roman Amphitheater of Bet Guvrin,” 93–94; Yoram Tsafrir and Gideon Foerster, “The Hebrew University Excavations at Beth-Shean, 1980–1994,” *Qadmoniot* 107–108 (1994): 113–114 (Hebrew); Porath, “Theatre, Racing, and Athletic Installations,” 38–39. On the *sacellum* and *tribunalia* in the Roman amphitheater, see Golvin, *L’amphithéâtre romain*, 337–340, 357–362.
167. Golvin, *L’amphithéâtre romain*, 177, 323.
168. The addition of a protective net for the spectators is known elsewhere as well, even in those places that had a high podium; see *ibid.*, 317–318. On safety problems deriving from the gladiatorial shows and animal-hunting in the arena, see A. Scobie (“Spectator Security and Comfort at Gladiatorial Games,” *Nikephoros* 1 [1988]: 191–243), who maintains that the net (pp. 210–211) was placed on the floor of the arena about 2 meters or more from the podium and not at its top, and thus, in effect, providing the spectators in the *cavea* with double protection.
169. Yosef Porath, “The Wall Paintings on the Podium of Herod’s ‘Amphitheatron,’ Caesarea,” *Michmanim* 14 (2000): 42–48 (Hebrew).
170. Hübsch, “Roman Amphitheater of Bet Guvrin,” 89–92. On the corridors and the various shafts in the amphitheater, see Golvin, *L’amphithéâtre romain*, 328–333.

CHAPTER 3 Entertaining the Crowds

1. John Chrysostom, *De inani gloria* 4, ed. Anne-Marie Malingrey, *Jean Chrysostome, Sur la vaine gloire et l’éducation des enfants*, SC 188 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1972), 74–78; trans. Max L. W. Laistner, *Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1951), 87–88.
2. *ibid.*
3. Pesiqta de Rav Kahana 12, 22, ed. Bernard Mandelbaum (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962), 220; Ecclesiastes Rabbah 12, 5; and see discussion in Chap. 2.
4. Genesis Rabbah 77, 3, ed. Yehudah Theodor and Chanoch Albeck, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1965), 912; *ibid.*, 10, 4, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 76; *ibid.*, 22, 9, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 216.
5. Dio Chrysostom, *Orat.* 32, 74–75, trans. James W. Cohoon and H. Lamar Crosby, vol. 3, LCL 358 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), 244.
6. Tertullian, *De Spectaculis*, 16, trans. Terrot R. Glover, LCL 250 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 270–272.

7. Lamentations Rabbah, Proem 17, ed. Shlomo Buber (Vilna: Romm, 1899), 7b.
8. See, for example, Pesiqta Rabbati, Add. 1, 4, ed. Meir Friedmann (Tel Aviv: Esther, 1963), 200; Genesis Rabbah 87, 4, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 1064; and cf. Deuteronomy Rabbah 19, ed. Saul Lieberman (Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrmann, 1940), 19–20. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.15: 26–27 in Gustave Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée, Histoire ecclésiastique*, vol. 1: *Livres 1–4*, SC 31 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1978), 186; Eusebius, *De Martyribus Palaestina* 6.5 (Greek version) in Gustave Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée, Histoire ecclésiastique*, vol. 3: *Livres 8–10 et Les Martyrs en Palestine*, SC 55 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1967), 139.
9. Origen, familiar with the performances in his day, refers to a man whose aim was to walk on a tightrope stretched across the theater in midair, whereas a juggler is mentioned in one of the inscriptions from Ḥammāt Gader; see Leah Di Segni, “The Greek Inscriptions of Ḥammāt Gader,” in Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Roman Baths of Hammat Gader* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1997), no. 25; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.69, ed. Marcel Robert, *Contre Celse*, CS 136 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1968), 158.
10. Maurice Sartre, *Bostra*, IGLS 13.1 (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1982), 338, no. 9407; see also Chap. 5, where it is suggested that Amazonios may have been a Jew by origin.
11. C. Bradford Welles, “The Inscriptions,” in *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis* (New Haven, CT: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1938), no. 192; for a reading of this inscription, see Louis Robert, “Inscriptions grecques de Phénicie et d’Arabie,” in *Mélanges syriens offerts à Monsieur René Dussaud*, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 30 (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1939), 2:735–738.
12. *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium* 32, trans. and comm. Jean Rougé (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1966), 166.
13. Eusebius, *History of the Martyrs in Palestine* (in Syriac), trans. and ed. William Cureton (London: Williams and Norgate, 1861), 11 (10).
14. Choricus, *Apologia Mimorum* 32.114–117, in *Choricii Gazaei, Opera*, ed. Richard Foerster and Eberhard Richtsteig, Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Leipzig: Teubner, 1929), 370–371. Choricus’s testimony provides invaluable information about mime performances held in the theater in the sixth century CE; see Violaine Malineau, “L’apport de l’*Apologie des mimes* de Choricus de Gaza à la connaissance du théâtre du VI^e siècle,” in *Gaza dans l’Antiquité Tardive. Archéologie, rhétorique et histoire*, ed. Catherine Saliou, Actes du colloque international de Poitiers, 6–7 mai 2004 (Salerno: Helios, 2005), 149–169.
15. Choricus, *Apologia Mimorum* 32.95, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig, 365.
16. Genesis Rabbah 80, 1, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 950–953; Lamentations Rabbah 3, 14, ed. Shlomo Buber (Vilna: Romm, 1899), 64; Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7, 14; Kallah Rabbati 9, 3, ed. Michael Higger (New York: Moinester, 1936), 329–331.
17. Richard C. Beacham, *The Roman Theatre and Its Audience* (London: Routledge, 1991), 129–140; Gesine Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 178–183. Webb’s comprehensive analysis

- examines the role of the mime in the late antique theater, the nature of the performances, and the status of the actors in Christian society; see Ruth Webb, *Demons and Dancers, Performance in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 95–138. On the use of various musical instruments in the mime, see Glenys E. M. Wootton, “Representations of Musicians in the Roman Mime,” *Mediterranean Archaeology* 17 (2004): 243–252.
18. See Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 15, trans. Terrot R. Glover, LCL 250 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 76–78, with a list of additional titles.
 19. Choricus, *Apologia Mimorum* 32.110, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig, 369.
 20. Glen W. Bowersock, *Mosaics as History: The Near East from Late Antiquity to Islam*, *Revealing Antiquity* 16 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 54, and generally, 31–63. According to Roueché, the mosaics from Madaba or the graffiti from Aphrodisias and Ephesus were directly influenced by scenes in the late antique theatrical shows, while the “mimes as well as pantomimes could be a vehicle for the transfer of the ‘tales of the Greeks’”; see Charlotte Roueché, “Images of Performances: New Evidence from Ephesus,” in *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession*, ed. Pat Easterling and Edith Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 254–281.
 21. Rina Talgam, “The *Ekhphrasis Eikonos* of Procopius of Gaza: The Depiction of Mythological Themes in Palestine and Arabia during the Fifth and Sixth Centuries,” in *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*, ed. Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Aryeh Kofsky, *Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture* 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 209–234, with references to other themes and mosaics known in the region.
 22. Bowersock, *Mosaics as History*, 60–61.
 23. Hermann Reich, *Der Mimus* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1903; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1974), 593–594. According to Webb, themes relating to the Christians, such as the mock baptism, could serve not just to humiliate the “other” but also to provide “a commentary on Christian practices that could be appreciated by certain Christians as well”; see Webb, *Demons and Dancers*, 99–100, 123–128.
 24. Lamentations Rabbah, Proem 17, ed. Shlomo Buber (Vilna: Romm, 1899), 7b.
 25. Wearing special clothing on the Sabbath was one way in which the Jews honored their day of rest: “‘And you shall honor it, not doing you own ways’ (Isa. 58:13). ‘And you shall honor it,’ that your Sabbath clothes should not be like your weekday clothes, and it is these that R. Yoḥanan called ‘Those that honor me’”; B Shabbat 113a (end); see also Tanḥuma, Genesis, 2: “He who did not have enough money should have washed his clothes for the Sabbath”; see J Megillah 4 1, 75a; B Bava Qamma 82a.
 26. In one Genizah manuscript it is written: “They bring a camel into the theater, and he is covered in his own *kikli*”; see Zvi M. Rabinovitz, *Ginzé Midrash: The Oldest Forms of Rabbinic Midrashim according to Geniza Manuscripts* (Tel Aviv: Chaim Rosenberg School for Jewish Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1976), 123 (Hebrew). *Kikli* means dung or refuse, so the garments on the camel were apparently soiled,

- perhaps like a sack with ashes as a sign of mourning; see Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Pardes, 1950), 1367 (s.v. אֶלְכָּרִי).
27. John Chrysostom describes vividly the mime performers and their roles, including one old man with a shaven head who was prepared to say and do anything; see John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Matt.* 37.6 (PG 57.426); see also Webb, *Demons and Dancers*, 99.
 28. Philo, *Against Flaccus* 32–39, trans. Francis H. Colson, vol. 9, LCL 363 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), 318–320; *Embassy to Gaius* 359, trans. Francis H. Colson, vol. 10, LCL 379 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 178.
 29. Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (= *GLAJJ*), 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974–1984), 2:94–107.
 30. Victor Tcherikover, Alexander Fuks, and Menahem Stern, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* (*CPJ*), 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957–1964), vol. 2, no. 158a, col. A, 6–7. See also the discussion in Victor Tcherikover, *The Jews in Egypt in the Hellenistic-Roman Age in the Light of the Papyri*, 2nd rev. ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1963), 163–164 (Hebrew).
 31. *CPJ*, vol. 3, no. 519. Stern and Fuks (*ibid.*, 116–117) suggest that the “Jewish load” must be an object such as a Torah scroll, tefillin, or a kind of tax. Kerkeslager argues that the “Jewish load” should be identified with a circumcised phallus, since the text takes offense at the image of a nude circumcised Jewish athlete in the Greek gymnasium; see Allen Kerkeslager, “Maintaining Jewish Identity in the Greek Gymnasium: A ‘Jewish Load’ in *CPJ* 3.519 (P. Schub. 37 = P. Berol. 13406),” *JSSJ* 28 (1997): 12–33. He further argues (pp. 27–32) that the text probably conforms best to the years 20 BCE–41 CE, thereby opposing the suggested date of ca. 200 CE.
 32. It is possible that our mime, in fact, reflects an event that took place in Caesarea in the past and is supposedly connected with Ḥanan’s testimony cited in the discussion regarding the observance of sabbatical year laws: “it was a sabbatical year, and the gentiles went to their circuses and left the marketplace full of fruit, and the Jews came and pillaged the merchandise. On their return, they (the gentiles) said: ‘Let’s go to the rabbis, lest they also permit them pigs.’” T Oholot 18, 16, ed. Moshe S. Zuckerman (Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrman, 1937), 617. Ḥanan’s testimony exhibits parallels with the mime’s text in R. Abbahu’s sermon, according to which stealing thorns is tantamount to stealing fruit of the sabbatical year, and the market vendors—in the image of the camel—mourned over their stolen merchandise.
 33. Margarete Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater*, 2nd rev. and enl. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 165, 248–249. The Charition mime, preserved on a fragment of *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* 413 from the second century CE, contains a conversation between several actors, including one portraying

- the fool whose behavior shocked the heroine; see Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 3 (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1903), 41–57, no. 413. This single richest source provides valuable insights into the “adultery mime,” a favorite theme for the stage whose role of the fool was popular among actors; see Webb, *Demons and Dancers*, 105–114.
34. Beacham, *Roman Theatre and Its Audience*, 132.
 35. A piece of papyrus representing a diadem, a doormat representing a robe, and a small piece of papyrus representing a scepter served in portraying King Agrippa’s image in a mime in Alexandria; see Philo, *Against Flaccus*, 37–38. The cross or baptismal font fulfilled the same purpose in the mime dealing with Christian rites, while such objects were sufficient to guide the audience in tracing the development of a plot; see Costas Panayotakis, “Baptism and Crucifixion on the Mimic Stage,” *Mnemosyne* 50 (1997): 302–319.
 36. A dog appeared onstage in a mime during Vespasian’s reign; see Plutarch, *Moralia* 973E–974A, vol. 12, ed. Harold Cherniss and William C. Helmbold, LCL 506 (London: Heinemann, 1957), 404. Synesios of Cyrene (*Eulogy of Baldness* 13.4) mentions a trained ram that performed onstage with the mime in the early fifth century; see Synésios de Cyrène, *Correspondance*, ed. Antonio Garzya; trans. Denis Roques, vol. 2 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2003), 72–73.
 37. T ‘Avodah Zarah 2, 6, ed. Zuckermendel, 462.
 38. J ‘Avodah Zarah 1 7, 40a; B ‘Avodah Zarah 18b; Yalqut Shim’oni, Psalms, 613. According to the Tosefta and the Bavli, these characters appeared in the stadium and circus; however, the addition, “House of Laughter” in the Yalqut Shim’oni version, refers to the theater. This detail was omitted from the various textual witnesses but appears several times in the continuation of all the texts. *Sigillarin* and *sigillaria* have been interpreted as referring to *ludi saeculares* celebrated once every century; see Martin Jacobs, “Theaters and Performances as Reflected in the Talmud Yerushalmi,” in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol. 1, ed. Peter Schäfer, Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 71 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 332–335.
 39. Beacham, *Roman Theatre and Its Audience*, 128–129; Allardyce Nicoll, *Masks, Mimes and Miracles: Studies in the Popular Theatre* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1963), 65–79.
 40. Krauss suggests identifying *mofion* with Pappus; see Samuel Krauss, *Griechische und Lateinische Lehnwörter in Talmud, Midrasch und Targum*, vol. 1 (Berlin: S. Calvary & Co., 1898; reprod. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1964), 327.
 41. Saul Lieberman, “Persecution of the Jewish Religion,” in *Saló Baron Jubilee Volume*, vol. 3 (New York: American Academy of Jewish Research, 1974), 244 (Hebrew). On the inscription from Dura Europos, see Henry R. Immerwahr, “Appendix II: Dipinti from G5, C2,” in *The Excavations at Dura Europos: Preliminary Report of the Ninth Season of Work*, ed. Michael I. Rostovtzeff et al. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1944), 212, 223.

42. Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 7 (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1910), 203–204, no. 1050.
43. Eric Csapo and William J. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 318–323.
44. Choricus, *Apologia Mimorum* 32.119–120, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig, 371.
45. Genesis Rabbah 80, 1, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 950–953, see also J Sanhedrin 2 5, 20c–d with textual variations, where it says that the sermon was delivered in Tiberias. On this and subsequent criticism of the Patriarchal dynasty, see Moshe D. Herr, “Synagogues and Theaters (Sermons and Satiric Plays),” in *Knesset Ezra: Literature and Life in the Synagogue—Studies Presented to Ezra Fleischer*, ed. Shulamit Elizur et al. (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1994), esp. 109–113 (Hebrew).
46. Beacham, *Roman Theatre and Its Audience*, 140–153; Ernst Wüst, “Pantomimus,” in *Paulys Realencyclopädie des klassischen Altertums*, vol. 18.3 (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1949), 834–870. Jory’s discussion of the pantomime comprises an analysis of several artistic portrayals that add, as he argues, an important perspective regarding the nature of the pantomime; see Edward J. Jory, “The Drama of the Dance: Prolegomena to an Iconography of Imperial Pantomime,” in *Roman Theater and Society*, ed. William J. Slater (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 1–27. According to Dunbabin, masks and costumes are props that help the viewer link the scene with pantomime; see Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, “The Pantomime Theonoe on a Mosaic from Zeugma,” *JRA* 23 (2010): 413–426; according to Wyles, while the dancer did not change his costume onstage, it was anticipated that the spectator would recognize both an iconic and symbolic use of signs associated with that costume. Together with the dancer’s change of masks and sequence of movements, one could also identify the characters in the pantomime; see Rosie Wyles, “The Symbolism of Costume in Ancient Pantomime,” in *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime*, ed. Edith Hall and Rosie Wyles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 61–86.
47. Pylades from Cilicia and Bathyllus from Alexandria introduced the pantomime in Rome in 22 BCE, the former tragic pantomime and the latter comic; see Edward J. Jory, “The Literary Evidence for the Beginnings of the Imperial Pantomime,” *BICS* 28 (1981): 147–161. Manuwald maintains that the emergence of pantomime as a dramatic form in Rome occurred sometime in the late 40s BCE or slightly later; see Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre*, 184–185. For the inclusion of pantomime in the agonistic festivals, see Glen W. Bowersock, “Aristides and the Pantomimes,” in *Aelius Aristides between Greece, Rome, and the Gods*, ed. William V. Harris and Brooke Holmes, *Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition* 33 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 69–77. According to Slater, pantomime became an integral part of the sacred games by the time of Commodus; see William J. Slater, “The Pantomime Tiberius Iulius Apolaustus,” *GRBS* 36 (1995): 263–292.
48. Lada-Richards maintains that the elites turned the pantomime into a crucial instrument in exercises of cultural self-definition and legitimacy; see Ismene Lada-

- Richards, “Was Pantomime ‘good to think with’ in the Ancient World?” in *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime*, ed. Edith Hall and Rosie Wyles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 285–313.
49. Cyril Moss, “Jacob of Serugh’s Homilies on the Spectacles of the Theatre,” *Le Muséon* 48 (1935): 87–112; Webb, *Demons and Dancers*, 58–94.
 50. Welles, “Inscriptions,” no. 192; Robert, “Inscriptions grecques de Phénicie et d’Arabie,” 735–738.
 51. *CIL* 14, supp. 4624; see also David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*, vol. 1, *Italy (excluding the City of Rome), Spain, and Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 28–30, no. 15.
 52. Otto Kern, *Die Inschriften von Magnesia am Maeander* (Berlin: W. Spemann, 1900), no. 192; Louis Robert, “Pantomimen im griechischen Orient,” *Hermes* 65 (1930): 106–122, esp. 117–118; see also William J. Slater, “*Inschriften von Magnesia* 192 Revisited,” *GRBS* 37 (1996): 195–204.
 53. *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium* 32, ed. Rougé, 166.
 54. *De Martyribus Palaestina* 6.1–2 in Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée*, 3:138–139.
 55. Di Segni, “Greek Inscriptions of Ḥammad Gader,” nos. 6, 10, and 19.
 56. Khirbet Castra: Avshalom Zemer, *Castra at the Foot of Mount Carmel: The City and Its Secrets* (Haifa: National Maritime Museum, 1999), 61. Gerasa: John H. Iliffe, “Imperial Art in Transjordan: Figurines and Lamps from a Potter’s Store at Jerash,” *QDAP* 11 (1944–1945): 1–26, esp. nos. 69–73. Additional masks (*ibid.*, nos. 75–81), smaller in size and used as pendants, further support this conclusion. Caesarea: Antonio Frova et al., *Scavi di Caesarea Maritima: Della Missione Archeologica Italiana diretta da A. Frova* (Milan: Istituto Lombardo, 1965), 202–203; see also Jory (“Drama of the Dance,” 13), who associates the mask in the hand of the statue with the pantomime and suggests identifying it with the muse of sacred poetry, Polyhymnia. Elsewhere he argues that the presence of closed-mouth masks, which in Roman imperial art reflect pantomime performances, did not become popular throughout the Greek East until the latter half of the second century CE; see Edward J. Jory, “The Masks on the Propylon of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias,” in Easterling and Hall, *Greek and Roman Actors*, 238–253.
 57. Louis Robert, *Études épigraphiques et philologiques* (Paris: Champion, 1938), 99–102. For a translation of the tablet, see John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 51–53. The site was never excavated, but the finds collected in the surveys may suggest that Jews, and later also Christians, resided in the town alongside pagans; see Robert C. Gregg and Dan Urman, *Jews, Pagans, and Christians in the Golan Heights: Greek and Other Inscriptions of the Roman and Byzantine Eras*, *South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism* 140 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1996), 27–44.
 58. Jerome, *Epistola* 43.2 (PL 22.479).
 59. Choricus, *Laud. Marc.* 2.70, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig, 45.

60. Choricus, *Orationes* 12 [= *Dialexeis* 21].1, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig, 248; and see Robert J. Penella, ed., *Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity: A Translation of Choricus of Gaza's Preliminary Talks and Declamations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 45.
61. J Sukkah 5 4, 55c [top] and cf. parallel traditions in J Sanhedrin 2 4, 20b; Numbers Rabbah 4, 20; and see the discussion in Chap. 5.
62. Ruth Webb, "Inside the Mask: Pantomime from the Performers' Perspective," in *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime*, ed. Edith Hall and Rosie Wyles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 43–60.
63. In the second century CE, Lucian lists several occasions when the people of Antioch cried out in a single voice against a dancer who did not fulfill his role onstage; in the fourth century CE, Libanius describes how the audience who left the theater study the body gestures and movements of the dancer; see Lucian, *On Dancing*, 76, ed. and trans. Austin M. Harmon, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 276–278; Libanius, *Oratio* 64.57; and see also Margaret E. Molloy, *Libanius and the Dancers*, *Altertumswissenschaftliche Texte und Studien* 31 (Hildesheim: Olms-Wiedmann, 1996), 126, 157. For similar reaction elsewhere in the Roman world, see Edward J. Jory, "Continuity and Change in the Roman Theatre," in *Studies in Honour of T. B. L. Webster*, ed. John H. Betts, J. T. Hooker, and John R. Green (Bristol: Bristol Classical, 1986), 143–152.
64. Lamentations Rabbah, Proem 12, ed. Buber, 6.
65. J Ta'anit 1 4, 64b; and see also Louis Ginzberg, *Ginzei Schechter*, vol. 1 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1928), 403–404. Compare Saul Lieberman's comments on this story: *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York 1994), 31–33 and the notes there. According to Lieberman (*ibid.*, 31), the talmudic word *babulia* is derived from the Latin κύμβαλον, which appears in the fifth-century lexicon of Hesychius.
66. William L. Westermann, "The Castanet Dancers of Arsinoe," *JEA* 10 (1924): 134–144; Martin David and Bernhard A. von Groningen, *Papyrological Primer* (Leiden: Brill, 1946), 91–92. On percussion instruments used in the pantomime (and mime) and their depictions in ancient art, see Wootton, "Representations of Musicians," 243–252.
67. Ruth Webb, "Female Entertainers in Late Antiquity," in Easterling and Hall, *Greek and Roman Actors*, 282–303.
68. Christopher P. Jones, "Greek Drama in the Roman Empire," *Theater and Society in the Classical World*, ed. Ruth Scodel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 39–52.
69. Pat Easterling and Richard Miles, "Dramatic Identities: Tragedy in Late Antiquity," in *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity*, ed. Richard Miles (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 95–111, esp. 100. Elsewhere Easterling argues that "The archaeological and epigraphic evidence seems to suggest that a live theatrical tradition persisted late in the Greek-speaking Eastern Mediterranean, and against

- this background performances of Menander are not unimaginable even into the fifth century”; see Pat Easterling, “Menander: Loss and Survival,” in *Stage Directions: Essays in Ancient Drama in Honour of E. W. Handley*, ed. Alan Griffiths, Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, Supplement 66 (London: Institute of Classical Studies, University of London School of Advanced Study, 1995), 153–160, esp. 157.
70. See, for example, J. Richard Green, “Drunk Again, A Study in the Iconography of the Comic Theater,” *AJA* 89 (1985): 465–472; and Axel Seeberg, “Tragedy and Archaeology, Forty Years Later,” *BICS* 46 (2003): 43–74. According to Dunbabin, special devices were created in late antiquity to help the audience follow the course of a play that probably contained several successive acts; see Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, “A Theatrical Device on the Late Roman Stage: The Relief of Flavius Valerianus,” *JRA* 19 (2006): 191–212. Csapo, in contrast, maintained that domestic theater art reflected the owner’s proclivity for elite culture; see Eric Csapo, *Actors and Icons of the Ancient Theater* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 140–167.
 71. Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 203–205. Apelles is mentioned another time, in Caligula’s day; see Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, trans. John C. Rolfe, rev. ed., 2 vols., LCL 31 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 1:33.
 72. Clayton M. Lehmann and Kenneth G. Holum, *The Greek and Latin Inscriptions of Caesarea Maritima*, The Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima, Excavation Reports 5 (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2000), 122–123, no. 126.
 73. Choricus, *Apologia Mimorum* 32.118, 141–142, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig, 371, 376–377.
 74. Choricus, *Declamations* 8 [XXIX] 31–32, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig, 323; and see also George A. Kennedy, trans., “Declamation 8 [XXIX] <Spartan Citizen>,” in *Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity: A Translation of Choricus of Gaza’s Preliminary Talks and Declamations*, ed. Robert J. Penella (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 164.
 75. Choricus, *Apologia Mimorum* 32.73, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig, 360–361.
 76. See, for example, George A. Reisner, Clarence S. Fisher, and David G. Lyon, *Harvard Excavations at Samaria, 1908–1910*, Harvard Semitic Series (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924), vol. 2, pl. 76t; Gerald L. Harding, “A Roman Family Vault on Jebel Jofeh, Amman,” *QDAP* 14 (1950): pl. 25, no. 69; Anthony W. McNicoll, Robert H. Smith, and J. Basil Hennessy, *Pella in Jordan*, 2 vols. (Canberra: Australia National Gallery, 1982), 2:44; John J. Davis, “Abila Tomb Excavations,” *Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin* 21 (1983): 37–38. According to Erlich, theatrical masks found at several Hellenistic sites in western Palestine have no connection with reality and do not imply the existence of theatrical activity in the region in the Hellenistic period; see Adi Erlich, “Figurines, Sculpture and Minor Art of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods,” in Ephraim Stern, *Excavations at Dor: Figurines, Cult Objects and Amulets, 1980–2000 Seasons* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2010), 132–134.

77. Gerasa: Iliffe, “Imperial Art in Transjordan,” nos. 57–59, 69–81. Hippos: Adi Erlich, “Terracotta Figurines and Masks,” in Arthur Segal et al., *Hippos-Sussita: Tenth Season of Excavations*, (Haifa: Zinman Institute of Archaeology, University of Haifa, 2009), 53–62. Aelia Capitolina: Renate Rosenthal-Heginbottom, “Hellenistic and Early Roman Fine Ware and Lamps from Area A,” in *Jewish Quarter Excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem Conducted by Nahman Avigad, 1969–1982*, vol. 2, ed. Hillel Geva (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2003), 213.
78. Jacob Pinkerfeld, “Two Fragments of a Marble Door from Jaffa,” *Atiqot* 1 (1955): 89–94.
79. Gregg and Urman, *Jews, Pagans, and Christians*, 269–270; Manfred Lindner, *Petra: Neue Ausgrabungen und Entdeckungen* (Munich: Delp, 1986), 162–165; Judith S. McKenzie, “Keys from Egypt and the East: Observations on Nabataean Culture in Light of Recent Discoveries,” *BASOR* 324 (2001): 105. According to Green, the masks found in several places in Petra evoke a generic form of theater culture and some kind of Greek culture as well; see J. Richard Green, “A Note on the Classification of Some Masks and Faces from Petra,” *PEQ* 130 (1998): 43–50.
80. Kenneth G. Holum, Robert L. Hohlfelder, and Robert L. Vann, *King Herod’s Dream: Caesarea on the Sea* (New York: Norton, 1988), 120–121; Rina Talgam and Zeev Weiss, *The Mosaics in the House of Dionysos at Sepphoris: Excavated by E. M. Meyers, E. Netzer and C. L. Meyers*, Qedem 44 (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University, 2004), 75.
81. Geoffrey Greatrex and John W. Watt, “One, Two or Three Feasts? The Brytae, the Maiuma and the May Festival at Edessa,” *Oriens Christianus* 83 (1999): 1–21; Nicole Belayche, *Judaea-Palaestina: The Pagan Cults in Roman Palestine (Second to Fourth Century)* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 249–253.
82. John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Matt.* 7.6 (PG 57.79). Huskinson argues that some of the mythological themes portrayed in several Antiochan mosaics can be associated with aquatic pantomime performances; see Janet Huskinson, “Theatre, Performance and Theatricality in Some Mosaic Pavements from Antioch,” *BICS* 46 (2002–2003): 131–165.
83. *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite* XXVII, XXX, trans. William Wright (London: Cambridge University Press, 1882; 1st facsimile repr. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2003), 17–18, 20–21.
84. Caesarea: Frova et al., *Scavi di Caesarea Maritima*, 183–184; Neapolis: Yitzhak Magen, *Flavia Neapolis: Shechem in the Roman Period*, Judea and Samaria Publications 11, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Staff Officer of Archaeology—Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria, Israel Antiquities Authority, 2009), 131–137; Shuni-Maiumas: Eli Shenhav, “The Maiumas Cult in Light of the Excavations at Shuni,” in *New Studies on the Coastal Plain: Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Conference of the Department of the Land of Israel Studies in Honor of Prof. Yehudah Felix*, ed. Eyal Regev (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1997), 56–70 (Hebrew). With the conversion of the Great Temple in Petra into a theatron that probably functioned as *odeion*

or council house in the early second century, the nearby pool complex was transformed into a public space used for public recreational swimming; see Leigh-Ann Bedal, *The Petra Pool-Complex: A Hellenistic Paradeisos in the Nabataean Capital* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2004), 183–184. The proximity of the two structures may suggest that water performances could have been conducted in the pool in conjunction with the nearby *odeion*; however, there is no other evidence to support this assumption. Furthermore, the pool fell into disrepair by the fourth century and was transformed into an industrial area at the time that the Maiuma festival was held elsewhere; therefore such performances could not take place here at all.

85. Welles, “Inscriptions,” no. 279; and see also Chester C. McCown, “The Festival Theater at the Birketein,” in *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis*, ed. Carl H. Kraeling (New Haven, CT: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1938), 159–167.
86. Charlotte Roueché, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity: The Late Roman and Byzantine Inscriptions* (London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 1989), 69–73. For further details on the pool and its construction, see Kenan T. Erim, “Recent Work at Aphrodisias, 1986–1988,” in *Aphrodisias Papers*, vol. 1, ed. Charlotte Roueché and Kenan T. Erim, JRA Supplementary Series 1 (Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1990), 20–23; R. R. R. Smith, “Archaeological Research at Aphrodisias, 1989–1992,” *Aphrodisias Papers*, vol. 3, ed. Charlotte Roueché and R. R. R. Smith, JRA Supplementary Series 20 (Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1996), 13, 45–49.
87. Leviticus Rabbah 5, 3, ed. Mordechai Margulies (Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1953–1960), 108; Mekhilta of R. Ishmael, Vayehi 1, ed. Hayyim S. Horowitz and Israel A. Rabin (Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrman, 1960), 84.
88. *Ant.* 15.270; 16.137.
89. Charlotte Roueché, *Performers and Partisans at Aphrodisias in the Roman and Late Roman Periods: A Study Based on Inscriptions from the Current Excavations at Aphrodisias in Caria*, Journal of Roman Studies Monographs 6 (London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 1993), 196–198.
90. Eusebius, *History of the Martyrs* (in Syriac) 21 (19).
91. Di Segni, “Greek Inscriptions of Ḥammāt Gader,” no. 10.
92. Alexandra Retzlaff and Abdel Majeed Mjely, “Figural Relief Sculpture from Jarash,” *ADAJ* 47 (2003): 75–82.
93. “This may be compared to a king who entered a province, and its inhabitants praised him, which pleased him; thereupon he entertained them with many foot races and charioteers”; see Genesis Rabbah 10, 4, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 76.
94. Zahra Newby, *Greek Athletics in the Roman World: Victory and Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 246–271; According to König, two types of sculptures portraying athletes circulated in the Roman world, ranging between idealization and realism; both were located in places associated with agonistic performances and training; see Jason König, *Athletics and Literature in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 102–132.

95. John W. Crowfoot, Kathleen M. Kenyon, and Eleazer L. Sukenik, *The Buildings of Samaria*, Samaria-Sebaste 1 (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1942), 43–45.
96. Scythopolis: I would like to thank Gabriel Mazor for this personal communication. Samaria: John W. Crowfoot, Grace M. Crowfoot, and Kathleen M. Kenyon, *The Objects from Samaria*, Samaria-Sebaste 3 (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1957), 72.
97. Kenneth. G. Holum, Robert L. Hohlfelder, and Robert L. Vann, *King Herod's Dream: Caesarea on the Sea* (New York: Norton, 1988), 117.
98. See, for example: Gems: Martin Henig and Mary Whiting, *Engraved Gems from Gadara in Jordan: The Sa'd Collection of Intaglios and Cameos* (Oxford: Oxford University Committee of Archaeology, 1987), 29–31, nos. 281–283, 288, 301–302; Anit Hamburger, *Gems from Caesarea Maritima*, 'Atiqot 8 (Jerusalem: Department of Antiquities and Museums, Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University, and Israel Exploration Society, 1968), 22, no. 147. Oil lamps: Nahman Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 204; Holum et al., *King Herod's Dream*, 138.
99. It would have sufficed to build a low wooden railing or wall around the orchestra so that it would contain the sand and be dismantled after the competitions.
100. Michael B. Poliakoff, *Combat Sports in the Ancient World: Competition, Violence, and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 7–18.
101. M Shabbat 22, 6; see also Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine*, 92–96.
102. Poliakoff, *Combat Sports*, 32–53.
103. Gerasa: Welles, “Inscriptions,” no. 194; Scythopolis: personal communication from Gabriel Mazor. Ascalon: *Expositio Totius Mundi* 32, ed. Rougé, 166.
104. Georg Kaibel, *Epigrammata Graeca* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1878), 392, no. 942.
105. Poliakoff, *Combat Sports*, 68–88.
106. Thomas F. Scanlon, “Greek Boxing Gloves: Terminology and Evolution,” *Stadion* 8/9 (1982–1983): 31–45. Murray describes the development of boxing gloves in the antique world and draws some similarities in their use between various cultures; see Steven R. Murray, “Boxing Gloves of the Ancient World,” *Journal of Combative Sport* (July 2010): 1–23, ejmas.com/jcs/2010jcs/jcsart_murray_1007.html (accessed October 15, 2012).
107. Luigi Moretti, *Iscrizioni agonistiche greche* (Rome: A. Signorelli, 1953), no. 85.
108. Louis Robert, “Inscriptions de Didymes et de Milet (1),” *Hellenica* 11–12 (1960): 440–446.
109. Choricus, *Apologia Mimorum* 32.150, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig, 378–379.
110. Poliakoff, *Combat Sports*, 54–63.
111. Moretti, *Iscrizioni*, no. 72; Roueché, *Performers and Partisans*, 232–236.
112. Welles, “Inscriptions,” no. 193.
113. Sofie Remijnsen, “Pammachon, A New Sport,” *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 47 (2010): 185–204.

114. Eusebius, *De Martyribus Palaestina* 11.19, in Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée*, 3:163; *Expositio Totius Mundi* 32, ed. Rougé, 166; Jerome, *Tractatus de Psalmo* 128 [CCSL 78.271].
115. Golden draws parallels between gladiatorial games and Greek combat sports, arguing that gladiators sought to represent themselves as athletes; see Mark Golden, *Greek Sport and Social Status* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 74–79.
116. Robert Brophy and Mary Brophy, “Deaths in Pan-Hellenic Games II: All Combatative Sports,” *American Journal of Philology* 106 (1985): 189–194.
117. Exodus Rabbah 27, 9.
118. Onno van Nijf, “Local Heroes: Athletics, Festivals and Elite Self-Fashioning in the Roman East,” in *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of the Empire*, ed. Simon Goldhill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 321–327.
119. Genesis Rabbah 77, 3, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 912–913.
120. Exodus Rabbah 21, 11.
121. Tanḥuma, Vayigash 3. Requests to terminate a combat occurred at times even before a contest had begun, as emerges, for example, from the victory inscription of Tiberius Claudius Marcianus, who won the wrestling match at Antioch-of-Pisidia: “As soon as his opponents saw him stripped, they begged to be excused”; see John G. C. Anderson, “Festivals of Mên Askaēnos in the Roman Colonia at Antioch of Pisidia,” *JRS* 3 (1913): 286–287, no. 12.
122. Midrash on Psalms 19, 6, ed. Shlomo Buber (New York: Om, 1948), 165.
123. On the origin of these competitions in the Greek world, see Edward N. Gardiner, *Athletics of the Ancient World* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930; repr. Mineola, NY: Dove, 2002), 128–143, 177–180; and Harold A. Harris, *Greek Athletes and Athletics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 64–80.
124. Moretti, *Iscrizioni*, no. 85.
125. Welles, “Inscriptions,” no. 193.
126. Robert, “Inscriptions de Didymes et de Milet,” 443–446.
127. Edhem Bey, “Fouilles de Tralles (1902–1903),” *BCH* 28 (1904): 87–89; Moretti, *Iscrizioni*, no. 78.
128. Welles, “Inscriptions,” no. 194.
129. Genesis Rabbah 56, 11, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 608; and see Michael Sokoloff, *The Genizah Fragments of Genesis Rabbah* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982), 139 (Hebrew).
130. Saul Lieberman, “From Aggadah to Halakhah,” *Sinai* 2 (1949): 54–58 (Hebrew).
131. Alan Cameron, *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 201–229; Yaron Dan, “Circus Factions (Blues and Greens) in Byzantine Palestine,” in *The Jerusalem Cathedral*, ed. Lee I. Levine (Jerusalem and Detroit: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi and Wayne State University, 1981), 1:105–119. On Greek-style chariot racing and the nature of these races in the Roman Empire, see David S. Potter, “Entertainers in the Roman Empire,” in *Life, Death, and*

- Entertainment in the Roman Empire*, ed. David S. Potter and David J. Mattingly (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 284–303.
132. For further discussion, see Chap. 6.
 133. Meijer provides a vivid description of a day in the Circus Maximus in Rome and the races held there; his account has a bearing upon similar events held elsewhere in the Mediterranean; see Fik Meijer, *Chariot Racing in the Roman Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 65–81.
 134. Midrash of King Solomon's Throne and the Hippodrome (ed. Adolph Jellinek, *Bet Ha-midrash*, repr. [Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1967], part 5, 38). For other details embedded in this source and their applicability to the ancient Palestinian hippodrome, see Chap. 2.
 135. John H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1986), 145–157.
 136. Archer St. Clair, "Imperial Virtue: Questions of Form and Function in the Case of Four Late Antique Statuettes," *DOP* 50 (1996): 153–155. Smith argues that the *mappa* can be understood as a part of the new dress toga suit in late antiquity, and when held up in the raised right hand it reflected a gesture of greeting and address to the public; see R. R. R. Smith, "Late Antique Portraits in a Public Context: Honorific Statuary at Aphrodisias in Caria, A.D. 300–600," *JRS* 89 (1999): 178–181.
 137. Thomas M. Weber, "La sculpture," in *Bosra aux portes de l'Arabie*, ed. Jacqueline Dentzer-Feydy et al., Guides archéologiques de l'Institut français du Proche-Orient 5 (Beirut: Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2007), 50–51; Nehemia Zori, "The Lid of Sarcophagus from Beth-Shean," *Atiqot* 3 (Hebrew Series), (1965): 65.
 138. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 87.
 139. Midrash on Psalms 17, 5, ed. Buber, 128; and see Chap. 5 for further details and analysis of the sermon.
 140. *Ant.* 15.271, 16.137. According to Meijer, one horse-racing event was held in the Circus Maximus for every five chariot races; see Meijer, *Chariot Racing in the Roman Empire*, 74. R. Yose's statement in M Kelim 23, 2 regarding the uncleanness of a horse-cloth used in the arena indirectly alluded to the fact that horse-riding shows were held in the Roman period as well: "These are susceptible to uncleanness as things used for riding upon. . . . R. Yose says: A horse-cloth is also susceptible to uncleanness as a thing used for sitting upon since they rest thereon in the *campon* (arena)." In addition, Weber notes two pieces of sculpture from Sheikh Sa'ad northwest of Dera'a that he believes portray hippic races or acrobatic games held in connection with Dionysiac festivals; see Thomas M. Weber, "Sculptures from Southern Syrian Sanctuaries of the Roman Period," in *The Sculptural Environment of the Roman Near-East: Reflection on Culture, Ideology, and Power*, ed. Yaron Z. Eliav et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 392–395.
 141. Welles, "Inscriptions," no. 194. I would like to thank Yuval Peleg (personal communication) for bringing my attention to this interesting sarcophagus from Samaria.

142. *Expositio Totius Mundi* 32, ed. Rougé, 166; Eusebius, *History of the Martyrs in Palestine* (in Syriac) 11 (10).
143. Ioannis Malalae, *Chronographia*, 15.8, 18.35, ed. Ioannes Thurn, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 35 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 305, 374, respectively, for Caesarea and Neapolis.
144. Jerome, *Vita Hilarionis* 16 (PL 23, 35).
145. *Ibid.*, 20 (PL 23, 36–38).
146. Choricus, *Apologia Mimorum* 32.114–118, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig, 370–371.
147. A sixth-century papyrus from Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, preserves the only known program in the hippodrome, which included other performances held between the races, including singing rope-dancers, gazelles and hounds, mimes, and a troupe of athletes; see *P. Oxy* 2707, in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* vol. 34, trans. and ed. L. Ingrams et al. (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1968), 91–92.
148. Welles, “Inscriptions,” no. 194.
149. John Rufus, *Plerophoriae*, 52, ed. François Nau, *Patrologia Orientalis* 8.1 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1912), 107.
150. Walter Ameling et al., *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae (CIIP)*, vol. 2, *Caesarea and the Middle Coast, 1121–2160* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 47–48, no. 1136; 559–562, no. 1679.
151. Silke Trzcionka, *Magic and the Supernatural in Fourth-Century Syria* (London: Routledge, 2007), 38–52, quote on 51.
152. CTh 9.16.11.
153. Jerome, *Vita Hilarionis* 20 (PL 23, 36–38).
154. Mordechai Margoloth, *Sefer Ha-Razim: A Newly Recovered Book of Magic from the Talmudic Period* (Jerusalem: Yediot Achronot, 1966), 94, 3:35–43 (Hebrew). For an English translation, see Michael A. Morgan, *Sefer Ha-Razim (The Book of the Mysteries)* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1983), 64.
155. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 42–49; Florent Heintz, “Circus Curses and Their Archaeological Contexts,” *JRA* 11 (1998): 337–342.
156. Ameling et al., *CIIP*, 559–562, no. 1679.
157. Keith Hopkins, *Death and Renewal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1–30; Potter, “Entertainers in the Roman Empire,” 303–324. Thomas Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators* (London: Routledge, 1992), 68–92.
158. Carlin A. Barton, *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans: The Gladiator and the Monster* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 11–81.
159. Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena: The Spectacle of Roman Power* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 79–119, quote on 118.
160. Garrett G. Fagan, *The Lure of the Arena: Social Psychology and the Crowd at the Roman Games* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 121–273, quote on 285.
161. *Ant.* 15.273–274.
162. *Ant.* 16.137.
163. *Ant.* 19.337.

164. Caesarea Philippi: *War* 7.23–24; Caesarea Maritima: *War* 7.37–38.
165. T 'Avodah Zarah 2, 7, ed. Zuckerman, 462; and see also the discussion in Chap. 5.
166. Caesarea: Eusebius, *History of the Martyrs* (in Syriac); cf. the Greek version in Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée*, 3:120–174. For further discussion of the events described in the text and their setup in Caesarea's urban context, see Joseph Patrich, "The Martyrs of Caesarea: The Urban Context," *LA* 52 (2002): 321–346. Scythopolis: Ammianus Marcellinus 19.12.8, trans. John C. Rolfe, 3 vols., LCL 300, 315, 331 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1950–1952), 1:534.
167. B Gittin 47a; Marc Z. Brettler and Michael Poliakoff, "Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish at the Gladiator's Banquet: Rabbinic Observations on the Roman Arena," *HTR* 83 (1990): 93–98.
168. Juvenal, *Satire* 3.343. The orchestra and its various components—the tuba (*salpinx*), the horn (*cornu*), and the water organ (*hydraulos*)—accompanying the gladiatorial combats are depicted, for example, in a mosaic from Zliten; see Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, Manuscripts on Classical Archaeology (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 66, fig. 46. Such instruments are also mentioned in rabbinic literature but not necessarily in the context of gladiatorial games; see, e.g., Leviticus Rabbah 29, 4, ed. Margulies, 674: "R. Josiah said: And the nations of the world do not know how to cheer. How many *cornūs* (horns) do they (the gentiles) have? How many *bucinae* (trumpets) do they have? How many *salpides* [var. *salpinx*] (tubas) do they have?" On *hydraulī*, see T 'Arakhin 1, 13, ed. Zuckerman, 544; J Sukkah 8 6, 58c (end); Genesis Rabbah 59, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 525.
169. Ronald Auguet, *Cruelty and Civilization: The Roman Games* (London: Routledge, 1994), 46–80. For a description of the various gladiatorial categories fighting in the Roman arena, see Marcus Junkelmann, "Familia Gladiatoria: The Heroes of the Amphitheatre," in *Gladiators and Caesars: The Power of Spectacle in Ancient Rome*, ed. Eckart Köhne and Cornelia Ewigleben (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 35–67.
170. Louis Robert, *Les gladiateurs dans l'Orient Grec*, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études: Sciences philologiques et historiques 278 (Paris: E. Champion, 1940; Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1971), 55–64. For the use of the term *ludarius* in rabbinic literature, see Daniel Sperber, *Essays on Greek and Latin in the Mishna, Talmud and Midrashic Literature* (Jerusalem: Makor, 1982), 10 n. 34.
171. Genesis Rabbah 96, Theodor and Albeck, 1200.
172. Compare Alexander Kohut, *Aruch Completum*, 9 vols. (Vienna: G. Bragg, 1878–1892), 5:176 (s.v. מונומאכוס).
173. B Gittin 47a; see also Abraham Wasserstein, "Resh Laqish among the Robbers," *Tarbiz* 49 (1979–80): 197–198 (Hebrew).
174. J Gittin 4 9, 46b; B Gittin 46b–47a.
175. Eusebius, *De Martyribus Palaestina* 7.4 in Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée*, 3:142.

176. M Kelim 24, 1. On weaponry and the shield in other contexts, see, e.g., the helmet, javelin, armor (M Kelim 11, 8), sword, knife, dagger, and spear (ibid., 13, 1). Similarly, see also the explanation of the phrase “Their weapons are tools of lawlessness” (Gen. 49:5): “R. Yoḥanan said: ‘It is Greek, in which swords are called *machaerin*’” (Genesis Rabbah 99, 7, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 1278).
177. Robert, *Les gladiateurs dans l’Orient Grec*, 20–23, Golden, *Greek Sport and Social Status*, 74–79.
178. See, for example, R. Ḥama bar Ḥanina’s sermon mentioned earlier (Genesis Rabbah 77, 3, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 912–913), in which he compares Jacob’s struggle with the angel to a wrestling match between two athletes, one an aristocrat and the other of a lower class. In the continuation of the discussion there (p. 915), R. Ḥanina bar Isaac notes that “all that night they were engaged in sparring each other.” Accordingly, the two wrestlers each stand opposite the shield of the other, which essentially suits the description of the events occurring in the gladiatorial shows. Some sources note that the *nobiles* fought in the arena voluntarily; see Erik Gunderson, “The Ideology of the Arena,” *Classical Antiquity* 15 (1996): 136–142.
179. *Aruch Completum*, ed. A. Kohut, 1:333 (s.v. אֶתְלֵטָה).
180. Genesis Rabbah 22, 9, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 216. For an analysis of the sermon and its political implications, see Joshua Levinson, “‘The Athlete of Piety’: Fatal Fictions in Rabbinic Literature,” *Tarbiz* 68 (1998): 61–86 (Hebrew).
181. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 55–67. According to Bomgardner, *venationes* were popular in the cities located along the supply route of wild beasts from Egypt, the Near East, and North Africa, to Italy and especially Rome; see David L. Bomgardner, *The Story of the Roman Amphitheatre* (London: Routledge, 2000), 115.
182. *Ant.* 15.273.
183. Eusebius, *De Martyribus Palaestina* 6.2, in Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée*, 3:138–139.
184. Ernest Will, “La coupe de Césarée de Palestine au Musée du Louvre,” *Monuments et Mémoires* 65 (1983): 1–24; Yehudit Turnheim and Sonia Mucznik, “The Caesarea Cup Reconsidered,” in ΚΑΛΑΘΟΣ, *Studies in Honour of Asher Ovadiah*, ed. Yehudit Turnheim, Sonia Mucznik, and Talila Michaeli, Assaph Studies in Art History 10–11 (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2005–2006), 637–650.
185. Yosef Porath, “The Wall Paintings on the Podium of Herod’s ‘Amphitheatron,’ Caesarea,” *Michmanim* 14 (2000): 42–48 (Hebrew).
186. Robert, *Les gladiateurs dans l’Orient Grec*, 310–324.
187. Leviticus Rabbah 12, 3, ed. Margulies, 277. The first part of the homily also found expression in *piyyut*; see H. Schirmann, “The Battle between Beasts and a Sea Monster according to an Early Hebrew *Piyyut*,” *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 3 (1970): 27–62 (Hebrew).
188. Seder Eliyahu Rabbah 8, ed. Meir Friedmann (Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrmann, 1960), 42; Yalqut Shim’oni, VaEyra’, 182.
189. Tanḥuma, Emor, 6, ed. Shlomo Buber, reprod. (Jerusalem: Ortsel, 1964), 43.

190. According to R. Nehemiah, God inflicted upon the Egyptians the plague of the flies by using a variety of animals—bears, lions, wolves, and tigers. R. Hama and R. Joshua add even panthers; see Midrash on Psalms 75, 10, ed. Buber, 175. These beasts are not typical of the fauna in Palestine but were well known in the Roman arena, which may have served as a source of inspiration for the rabbis.
191. Tanḥuma, Vayigash, 3, ed. Buber, 204.
192. The arrival of two lions and a bull brought for the *venationes* is depicted on the Caesarea cup commemorating the anniversary of the city's foundation, which was celebrated with games in honor of the caesar; see Will, "La coupe de Césarée," 15. Both animals appear on mosaics depicting wild animals in the amphitheater; see, for example, the mosaic from Zliten, North Africa: Georges Ville, "Essai de datation de la mosaïque des gladiateurs de Zliten," in *La mosaïque gréco romaine* (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1965), 147–155.
193. See, e.g., Dunbabin, *Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, 65–87; Junkelmann, "Familia Gladiatoria," 31–74; Jonathan Coulston, "Victory and Defeat in the Roman Arena: The Evidence of Gladiatorial Iconography," in *Roman Amphitheatres and Spectacula: A 21st Century Perspective, Papers from an International Conference Held at Chester, 16th–18th February 2007*, ed. Tony Wilmott, B.A.R. International Series 1946 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009), 195–210. The Romans considered the execution of criminals in the arena legitimate, and this is also the reason, together with the extreme pleasure they derived from it, that they decorated their houses with amphitheatrical scenes; see Shelby Brown, "Death as Decoration: Scenes from the Arena on Roman Domestic Mosaics," in *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, ed. Amy Richlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 180–211.
194. Benjamin Mazar, *Beth She'arim: Report on the Excavations during 1936–1940*, vol. 1, *Catacombs 1–4* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1973), 184–185; Vas-silios Tzaferis, "A Monumental Roman Tomb at Tell 'Eitun," *Atiqot* 8 (1982): 22–25, figs. 1–2 (Hebrew).
195. Dimitri C. Baramki, "Two Roman Cisterns in Beth Nattif," *QDAP* 5 (1936): 5, pl. III 2, VI.1; Mazar, *Beth She'arim*, 213, fig. 23:4. Other examples are in the collections of the Israel Antiquities Authority: inv. nos. 62–585, 77–198, and 86–270.
196. Yehuda Dagan et al., "An Inscribed Lintel from Beth Guvrin," *IEJ* 35 (1985): 28–34; David Amit, Jon Seligman, and Irina Zilberbod, "The 'Monastery of Theodorus and Cyriacus' on the Eastern Slope of Mount Scopus, Jerusalem," in *One Land—Many Cultures: Archaeological Studies in Honour of Stanislaw Loffreda*, OFM, ed. Giovanni C. Bottini, Leah Di Segni, and L. Daniel Chrupcala (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2003), 146–147.

CHAPTER 4 Financing, Organization, and Operation

1. *Ant.* 15.268–274; 16.137–138.
2. *Ant.* 16.146–149; *War* 1.422–426.

3. *Ant.* 19.335–337, 343–344.
4. Philip C. Hammond, *The Excavation of the Main Theater at Petra, 1961–1962: Final Report*, Colt Archaeological Institute Publications (London: B. Quaritch, 1965), 62–65.
5. Arnold H. M. Jones, *The Roman Economy: Studies in Ancient Economic and Administrative History* (Oxford: Blackwell 1974), 25–29; Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society, and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 37–38; Frank Sear, *Roman Theatres: An Architectural Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 11–23. According to Duncan-Jones, 58 percent of the total public structures in the Roman cities of North Africa were built with private funds; see Richard P. Duncan-Jones, “Who Paid for Public Buildings in Roman Cities?” in *Roman Urban Topography in Britain and the Western Empire: Proceedings of the Third Conference on Urban Archaeology*, ed. Francis Grew and Brian Hobley (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1985), 28–33 (= Duncan-Jones, *Structure and Scale in the Roman Economy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002], 176–177). On imperial involvement in public construction in the East, see Stephen Mitchell (“Imperial Building in the Eastern Roman Provinces,” *HSCP* 91 [1987]: 333–365), who maintains that the emperor allocated funds directly to the construction of the buildings and sometimes provided part of the building materials or laborers, and in some instances indirectly funded them either by tax exemption or remission of debts. Private wealth and civic monies financed the building of many theaters, yet based on the extant inscriptions, imperial support of theater construction was significant in some areas, constituting at least one-third of the surviving evidence in the East; see Mary C. Sturgeon, “Dedications of Roman Theaters,” in *XAPIE: Essays in Honor of Sara A. Immerwahr*, ed. Anne P. Chapin, *Hesperia Supplement* 33 (Princeton, NJ: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2004), 412–429.
6. Benjamin H. Isaac, *The Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 344–371; Maurice Sartre, *The Middle East under Rome* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 160–161, 163–165.
7. Sturgeon, “Dedications of Roman Theaters,” 419–422.
8. Sandrine Agusta-Boularot and Jacques Seigne, “La vie civique de Gerasa de la Décapole: L’apport des inscriptions du ‘théâtre’ nord de Jerash,” *Mélanges de l’école française de Rome. Antiquité* 116 (2004): 488–514.
9. C. Bradford Welles, “The Inscriptions,” in *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis* (New Haven, CT: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1938), nos. 51–52.
10. William H. Waddington, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie* (Paris: F. Didot, 1870; repr. Rome: “L’Erma” di Bretschneider, 1968), nos. 2341–2342. According to Freyberger, these donations were made for enlarging and decorating the second phase of the building; Klaus S. Freyberger, “Das Theater in Kanatha: Funktion und Bedeutung,” *Antigüedad y Cristianismo* 21 (2004): 13–32.

11. Avraham Negev, *The Greek Inscriptions from the Negev*, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Collectio Minor 25 (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing, 1981), 73–76.
12. Welles, “Inscriptions,” no. 192.
13. Scythopolis: Shimon Applebaum et al., “Varia Epigraphica,” *SCI* 4 (1978): 139–140; Baruch Lifshitz, “Notes d’épigraphie grecque,” *ZPE* 6 (1970): 62. Eleutheropolis: Amos Kloner and Alain Hübsch, “The Roman Amphitheater of Bet Guvrin: A Preliminary Report on the 1992, 1993, and 1994 Seasons,” *Atiqot* 30 (1996): 100–101. Gerasa: Zbigniew Borkowski, “Inscriptions on Altars from the Hippodrome of Gerasa,” *Syria* 66 (1989): 79–83.
14. Clayton M. Lehmann and Kenneth G. Holum, *The Greek and Latin Inscriptions of Caesarea Maritima*, The Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima, Excavation Reports 5 (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2000), 122–123, no. 126.
15. Pierre-Louis Gatier, *Inscriptions de la Jordanie*, vol. 2, *Région centrale (Amman, Hesban, Madaba, Main, Dhiban)*, IGLS 21.2 (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1986), 38, no. 12.
16. Exodus Rabbah, Pequdei, 51, 8.
17. Avot de Rabbi Nathan, A, 28, ed. Schneur Z. Schechter (New York: Feldheim, 1945), 87.
18. David Johnston, “Munificence and Municipia: Bequests to Towns in Classical Roman Law,” *JRS* 75 (1985): 105–125. This is known also in Roman Egypt; see Alan K. Bowman, *The Town Councils of Roman Egypt*, American Studies in Papyrology 11 (Toronto: A. M. Hakkert, 1971), 9–10, 26–27. See also Richard P. Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire: Quantitative Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 82–88.
19. Genesis Rabbah 76, 6, ed. Yehudah Theodor and Chanoch Albeck (Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1965), 904. For further discussion and additional references testifying to this phenomenon, see Saul Lieberman, “Palestine in the Third and Fourth Centuries,” *JQR* 36 (1946): 346–348. The involvement of the wealthy in city life and their willingness to contribute, either because of the economic crisis or because of changes in the religious-cultural structure of the city, diminished significantly in the course of the third century CE; see Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 27–53.
20. On the assessment of building costs of theaters, see, for instance, Sear, *Roman Theatres*, 19–23. For a broader examination of various building costs in the Roman world, see Duncan-Jones, *Economy of the Roman Empire*, 75–78.
21. The paucity of data regarding the Roman amphitheaters built in ancient Palestine and Arabia does not allow us to examine the relationship between the size of a building and the settlement in which it was located.
22. It is not always possible to calculate the number of seats in a theater. When estimates are suggested, only assessments of seating capacity are made, as in the case of the southern theater in Scythopolis: Applebaum suggests that there were 8,000 seats (Shimon Applebaum, “The Roman Theatre of Scythopolis,” *SCI* 4 [1978]: 78),

- Fuks estimates 6,000 seats (Gideon Fuks, *Scythopolis: A Greek City in Eretz Israel* [Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1983], 130 [Hebrew]), and Atrash offers a maximalistic size in the Severan period of 9,800 seats (Walid Atrash, “Entertainment Structures in the Civic Center of Nysa-Scythopolis [Beth-She’an] during the Roman and Byzantine Periods” [PhD diss., University of Haifa, 2006], 89 [Hebrew]).
23. In contrast, Bowsher argues that the size of the theaters in the Decapolis was not directly related to the population but rather to civic wealth and importance; see Julian M. C. Bowsher, “Civic Organisation within the Decapolis,” *ARAM* 4 (1992): 275–278. In trying to assess the size of the population in the cities of North Africa, Duncan-Jones notes that the size of the theater or amphitheater was determined by the economic capability of the city and was not always proportional to the number of the city’s inhabitants; see Richard P. Duncan-Jones, “City Population in Roman Africa,” *JRS* 53 (1963): 85. In contrast, in his discussion of the circuses in North Africa, Humphrey surmises that there was a direct relationship between the size of the building and the city in which it was built; see John H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1986), 334–335.
 24. A theater and *odeon*, which have been partially excavated in recent years, also stood in Ascalon; see Colin Henderson and Eric G. Turner, eds., *Catalogue of the Greek Papyri in the John Rylands Library, Manchester*, vol. 4, *Documents of the Ptolemaic, Roman, and Byzantine Periods* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1952), 117–124, no. 627, lines 212–222.
 25. Sear, *Roman Theatres*, 15–17.
 26. Pliny, *Letters and Panegyricus* 10.39, trans. Betty Radice, 2 vols., LCL 55 and 59 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1969), 2:213–215.
 27. Moshe Kochavi, *Aphek-Antipatris: Five Thousand Years of History* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1989), 92–94 (Hebrew).
 28. Susanne Kerner and Adolf Hoffmann, “Gadara-Umm Qeis: Preliminary Report on the 1991 and 1992 Seasons,” *ADAJ* 37 (1993): 360.
 29. Gerasa: Frank Sear and Andrew Hutson, “Reconstructing the South Theatre at Jerash,” *ANES* 37 (2000): 3–27; Sear and Hutson, “The South Theatre at Jarash: 1996 Campaign,” *SHAJ* 8 (2004): 389–397. Bostra: Jean-Marie Dentzer, Pierre-Marie Blanc, and Thibaud Fournet, “Le développement urbain de Bosra de l’époque nabatéenne à l’époque byzantine: Bilan de recherches françaises, 1981–2002,” *Syria* 79 (2002): 143; Jacqueline Dentzer-Feydy, “L’amphithéâtre,” in *Bosra aux portes de l’Arabie*, ed. Jacqueline Dentzer-Feydy et al., Guides archéologiques de l’Institut français du Proche-Orient 5 (Beirut: Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2007), 173–178. Such was the case in the theater in Amman, which was built in the second half of the first century CE and whose stage was redesigned in the Antonine period; see Fawzi el-Fakharani, “Das Theater von Amman in Jordanien,” *AA* 90/3 (1975): 400–403.

30. Augusta-Boularot and Seigne, “La vie civique,” 481–522; Jacques Seigne and Sandrine Augusta-Boularot, “Le théâtre nord de Gerasa/Jerash (Jordanie): Fonctions et chronologie,” *TOIIOI* 12–13 (2005): 339–357.
31. Atrash, “Entertainment Structures,” 83–126.
32. Yosef Porath, “Theatre, Racing, and Athletic Installations in Caesarea,” *Qadmoniot* 125 (2003): 31–33 (Hebrew); Joseph Patrich, “The *Carceres* of the Herodian Hippodrome/Stadium at Caesarea Maritima and the Connections with the Circus Maximus,” *JRA* 14 (2001): 269–283.
33. Eleutheropolis: Kloner and Hübsch, “Roman Amphitheater of Bet Guvrin,” 103. Gerasa: Augusta-Boularot and Seigne, “La vie civique,” 514–522. Elusa: Negev, *Greek Inscriptions*, 73–76.
34. Onno van Nijf, “Local Heroes: Athletics, Festivals and Elite Self-Fashioning in the Roman East,” in *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of the Empire*, ed. Simon Goldhill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 306–334. On the games in Greece in the Roman period and their influence on city life, see Antony J. S. Spawforth, “Agonistic Festivals in Roman Greece,” in *The Greek Renaissance in the Roman Empire: Papers from the Tenth British Museum Classical Colloquium*, ed. Susan Walker and Averil Cameron, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, Supplement* 55 (London: Institute of Classical Studies, University of London, 1989), 193–197.
35. Bru opines that the games in Syria, Phoenicia, and Arabia were established in the spirit of the Greek tradition; however, these also included Roman performances, thereby creating a cultural mélange. Nevertheless, he claims, it is difficult to determine which of the two traditions was more popular among the inhabitants of the region; see Hadrien Bru, “Les concours grecs dans les provinces syriennes, d’Auguste à Constantin,” *Stadion* 33/1 (2007): 1–28.
36. Agrippa died on the second day of the plays performed in Caesarea; see *Ant.* 19:343–344.
37. This is what seems to emerge, at least from the end of the inscription in honor of Titus Flavius Gerrenus in Gerasa; see Welles, “Inscriptions,” no. 192. R. Nehemiah’s homily, which explains how it happened that Joseph remained at home alone with Potiphar’s wife, stating that “it was a theater day, and everyone went to see” (Genesis Rabbah 87, 7, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 1071–1072), seems to hint in this direction, just as R. Ḥanan attests with regard to Caesarea: “It was the sabbatical year, and the gentiles went to their circuses and left the marketplace full of fruit, and the Jews came and pillaged the merchandise” (T Oholot 18, 16, ed. Moshe S. Zuckerman, *Tosephta*, 2nd ed. [Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrman, 1937], 617).
38. For a discussion of the types of games and what motivated Josephus to describe the events in Jerusalem, see Jan W. van Henten, “The *Panegyris* in Jerusalem: Responses to Herod’s Initiative (Josephus, *Antiquities* 15:268–291),” in *Empsychoi Logoi—Religious Innovations in Antiquity: Studies in Honour of Pieter Willem van der Horst*, ed. Alberdina Houtman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 151–173.

39. *Ant.* 16.136–140; *War* 1.415; and see also the discussion in Chap. 1, note 9, regarding the date of the games in Caesarea and their relationship to the Actian games founded by Augustus in Nicopolis.
40. *Ant.* 19.343. According to Schwartz, they were held in late 43 CE during the fourteenth celebration of Herod's Isactium in honor of Augustus, whereas Kokkinos places them at the time of the celebrations honoring Claudius's victorious return from his campaign in Britain in the spring of 44 CE; see Daniel R. Schwartz, *Agrippa I: The Last King of Judaea*, Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 23 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), 107–111; Nikos Kokkinos, *The Herodian Dynasty: Origins, Role in Society and Eclipse*, Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigraphia, Supplement Series 30 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 378–380. In Berytus, Agrippa I held shows and musical performances in the theater and gladiatorial games in the amphitheater (see *Ant.* 19.335–336), while Agrippa II provided the same city with theaters and annual performances (see *Ant.* 20.211–212).
41. Gerasa: Welles, "Inscriptions," no. 192. Gaza: *Chronicon Paschale* 1, ed. Ludwig A. Dindorf, CSHB 14 (Bonn: E. Weber, 1832), 474. Caesarea: *CIG* 4472 = Luigi Moretti, *Iscrizioni agonistiche greche* (Rome: A. Signorelli, 1953), no. 85. Damascus: *CIL* 14.474; Moretti, *Iscrizioni*, no. 90; Wolfgang Leschhorn, "Die Verbreitung von Agonen in den östlichen Provinzen des römischen Reiches," *Stadion* 24/1 (1998): 56; Warwick Wroth, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum—Galatia, Cappadocia, and Syria* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, Dept. of Coins and Medals, 1899), 286–288, nos. 21–22, 31–33. Graf enumerates additional cities that supposedly conducted games during the religious festival, although he has not provided any direct evidence to support his hypothesis; see Fritz Graf, "Roman Festivals in Syria Palaestina," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol. 3, ed. Peter Schäfer, Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 93 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 435–451.
42. Carl Wessely, ed., *CPH* 5.1 (Leipzig: E. Avenarius, 1905; Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1965), nos. 70, 74.
43. *Ant.* 15.269–271; *War* 1.415.
44. Moretti, *Iscrizioni*, no. 72; Charlotte Roueché, *Performers and Partisans at Aphrodisias in the Roman and Late Roman Periods: A Study Based on Inscriptions from the Current Excavations at Aphrodisias in Caria*, Journal of Roman Studies Monographs 6 (London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 1993), 232–236.
45. Moretti, *Iscrizioni*, no. 85.
46. Fawzi Zayadine and Zbigniew T. Fiema, "Roman Inscriptions from the Siq of Petra," *ADAJ* 30 (1986): 202–203; Maurice Sartre, *Inscriptions de la Jordanie*, vol. 4, *Pétra et la Nabatène méridionale du wadi al Hasa au golfe de 'Aqaba*, IGLS 21.4 (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1993), 42–46, nos. 9–13.
47. Gardiner maintained that the Greek athletes developed their expertise in one area, which reached a peaked in the imperial era; see Edward N. Gardiner, *Athletics of the Ancient World* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930; repr. Mineola, NY: Dover, 2002), 99–107.

- Young, for his part, claims that the athletes were versatile in several areas; see David C. Young, “First with the Most: Greek Athletic Records and ‘Specialization,’” *Nikephoros* 9 (1996): 175–197.
48. Damascus: Edhem Bey, “Fouilles de Tralles (1902–1903),” *BCH* 28 (1904): 87–89. Gerasa: Welles, “Inscriptions,” nos. 193–194; see also Louis Robert, “Inscriptions grecques de Phénicie et d’Arabie,” in *Mélanges syriens offerts à Monsieur René Dussaud*, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 30 (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1939), 2:729–738.
 49. Roueché, *Performers and Partisans*, 196–198.
 50. Bostra: Wessely, *CPh* 5.1, no. 74. Gaza: *ibid.*, no. 70.
 51. Moretti, *Iscrizioni*, no. 90.
 52. Louis Robert, “Inscriptions de Didymes et de Milet (1),” *Hellenica* 11–12 (1960): 440–446; Baruch Lifshitz, “Études sur l’histoire de la province romaine de Syrie,” *ANRW* II/8 (1978): 9–11.
 53. Leschhorn, “Die Verbreitung von Agonen,” 31–57; Mustapha Khanoussi, “Les spectacles de jeux athlétiques et de pugilat dans l’Afrique romaine,” *MDAIR* 98 (1991): 315–322. Between 180 and 275 CE, most Greek cities in the Roman East celebrated the popularity and regularity of the festival and games by striking coins bearing agonistic themes; see Kenneth W. Harl, *Civic Coins and Civic Politics in the Roman East, A.D. 180–275* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 63–70.
 54. *Ant.* 16.136–140; *War* 1.415.
 55. *Ant.* 19.343; and see also Schwartz, *Agrippa I*, 110–111. According to Kokkinos, this occurred in 44 CE during the *hyper sôtērias* festival celebrated in the city in honor of Claudius; see Kokkinos, *Herodian Dynasty*, 378. On the games during the reign of Agrippa I, see Manfred Lämmer, “The Attitude of King Agrippa I towards Greek Contests and Roman Games,” *Physical Education and Sports in the Jewish History and Culture, Proceedings of an International Seminar at Wingate Institute, July 1973*, ed. Uriel Simri (Netanya: Wingate Institute 1981), 7–17. Lämmer suggests that Agrippa, unlike Herod, held games only in gentile regions, and therefore assumes that the king also held games in Paneas when he appropriated Philip’s kingdom.
 56. Moretti, *Iscrizioni*, no. 85. Caesarea is mentioned in the inscription twice as a place of victory—the “World Severan” games held at Augusta Caesarea and the Isactium games of Caesarea. With regard to the former, it is agreed that the reference is to Caesarea Maritima, founded by Herod the Great. The latter is sometimes identified with Caesarea Philippi (Paneas); see, for example, Félix-Marie Abel, *Histoire de la Palestine depuis la conquête d’Alexandre jusqu’à l’invasion arabe* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1952), 2:160; Louis Jalabert and René Mouterde, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, vol. 4, *Laodicée, Apamène* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1955), no. 1265. Various reasons lead Schwartz to suggest that both cities by the name of Caesarea mentioned in the inscription refer to Caesarea Maritima; see Daniel R. Schwartz, “‘Caesarea’ and Its ‘Isactium’: Epigraphy, Numismatics and Herodian Chronology,” in Schwartz,

- Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 60 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 167–181.
57. Roueché, *Performers and Partisans*, 196–198.
 58. Moretti, *Iscrizioni*, no. 72; Roueché, *Performers and Partisans*, 232–236.
 59. Will argues that the Caesarea cup commemorated the anniversary of the foundation of the city, which was celebrated with games in honor of the caesar; see Ernest Will, “La coupe de Césarée de Palestine au Musée du Louvre,” *Monuments et Mémoires* 65 (1983): 1–24. Turnheim and Mucznik believe that the images on the Caesarea cup reflect the Pythian games instituted in the city by Septimus Severus; see Yehudit Turnheim and Sonia Mucznik, “The Caesarea Cup Reconsidered,” in ΚΑΛΑΘΟΣ, *Studies in Honour of Asher Ovadiah*, ed. Yehudit Turnheim, Sonia Mucznik, and Talila Michaeli, Assaph Studies in Art History 10–11 (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2005–2006), 637–650. Eusebius mentions that various types of games were held in the circus, the theater, and the municipal stadium; see Eusebius, *History of the Martyrs in Palestine* (in Syriac), trans. and ed. William Cureton (London: Williams and Norgate, 1861), 11 (10); see also Joseph Patrich, “The Martyrs of Caesarea: The Urban Context,” *LA* 52 (2002): 321–346.
 60. *Chronicon Paschale* 1, ed. Dindorf, 474. Many cities throughout the eastern Mediterranean conducted games in honor of Hadrian, who was a fan of festivals and competitions; see Mary T. Boatwright, *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 94–104. Wallner doubts whether any games were held during the festival held in Gaza in honor of the caesar; see Christian Wallner, “Zur Agonistik von Gaza,” *ZPE* 135 (2001): 125–130.
 61. Wessely, *CPH* 5.1, no. 70; Wallner, “Zur Agonistik von Gaza,” 130–135.
 62. Moretti, *Iscrizioni*, no. 72; Roueché, *Performers and Partisans*, 232–236; Wessely, *CPH* 5.1, no. 70.
 63. Jerome, *Vita Hilarionis* 16 (PL 23, 35); 20 (PL 23, 36–38). For the early sixth-century festivals, see Fotios K. Litsas, “Choricus of Gaza and His Description of Festivals at Gaza,” *JÖB* 32/3 (1982): 427–436. For a detailed discussion of the nature of the performances and games held in Gaza throughout its history, see Zeev Weiss, “Games and Spectacles in Ancient Gaza: Performances for the Masses Held in Buildings Now Lost,” in *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*, ed. Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Arie Kofsky, Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 28–36.
 64. Welles, “Inscriptions,” no. 192.
 65. *Ibid.*, nos. 193–194.
 66. *CIL* 14.474.
 67. Arie Kindler, *The Coinage of Bostra* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1983), 44–46; Maurice Sartre, *Bostra: Des origines à l’Islam*, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 117 (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1985), 156–158. For the depiction of the god Dushara on the coins of Bostra and for information on the games that combine the Nabataean cult and Greek culture, see Glen W. Bowersock, “The Cult and Representations of

- Dusares in Roman Arabia,” in *Petra and the Caravan Cities: Proceedings of the Symposium Organized in Petra in September 1985 by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, and the Iconographic Lexicon of Classical Mythology (LIMC), with the Financial Support of UNESCO*, ed. Fawzi Zayadine (Amman: Department of Antiquities of Jordan, 1990), 31–36.
68. Wessely, *CPH* 5.1, no. 74; Christian Wallner, “Der olympischen Agon von Bostra,” *ZPE* 129 (2000): 97–107.
 69. *Ant.* 19.343.
 70. Roueché, *Performers and Partisans*, 7–11; van Nijf, “Local Heroes,” 312–314; Sear, *Roman Theatres*, 23. Mitchell maintains that the wealthy of the third century CE preferred to contribute to the games and not to the construction of the buildings, either because they thought it unnecessary to build additional structures in the city or because of the burdensome fiscal situation and, possibly, that it would suffice to do their civic duty by making a modest contribution to the games; see Stephen Mitchell, “Festivals, Games, and Civic Life in Roman Asia Minor,” *JRS* 80 (1990): 183–193.
 71. Plutarch opposed those who used their money to buy public favor; Plutarch, *Moralia* 822. The personal commitment of the donor to society is what motivated various donors to fund the games in the cities of Asia Minor; see David Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor, to the End of the Third Century after Christ*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), 1:653–655. Veyne, for his part, posits that the funding of the games was a necessary condition for a magistrate’s political advancement, and that this is why the leaders invested great efforts and means in this direction; see Paul Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism* (London: Allen Lane, 1990; Penguin, 1992), 208–214.
 72. Louis Robert, *Les gladiateurs dans l’Orient Grec*, Bibliothèque de l’École des Hautes Études: Sciences philologiques et historiques 278 (Paris: E. Champion, 1940; Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1971), 267–280; Garnsey and Saller, *Roman Empire*, 32–38.
 73. Exodus Rabbah, Mishpatim, 30, 24.
 74. Robert, *Les gladiateurs dans l’Orient Grec*, 276–280. The *philotimia* generally refers to any donation; however, in the third century CE it was designated primarily to fund performances and games; see Isidore Lévy, “Notes d’histoire et d’épigraphie,” *REJ* 41 (1900): 182–183; Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations: 50 B.C. to A.D. 288* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 61–62, 125.
 75. See, for example, Genesis Rabbah 50, 12, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 530; see also Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1990), 291.
 76. Alison E. Cooley and M. G. L. Cooley, *Pompeii: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2004), 48–54.
 77. Seder Eliyahu Rabbah 8, ed. Meir Friedmann, 42 (Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrmann, 1960); Yalqut Shim’oni, VaEyra’, 182.

78. Genesis Rabbah 10, 4, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 76. The emperor would hold performances when he visited cities in the provinces, where he would meet the local inhabitants and at times even speak before them; see Fergus Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World (31 BC–AD 337)* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 366–367.
79. Eusebius, *History of the Martyrs*, 21 (19).
80. Antioch collaborated in the revolt of Avidius Cassius, and in 175 CE Marcus Aurelius punished the inhabitants of the city by abolishing the local games; see *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Marcus Antoninus 25.8–12; see also Glanville Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria: From Seleucus to the Arab Conquest* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 226–229. According to Libanius, the suspension of the games was a drastic measure that involved the ability to restore order in the city; see Libanius, *Oration* 20.6, in Albert F. Norman, trans., *Libanius, Selected Works*, vol. 2, LCL 452 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 314–315.
81. Arnold H. M. Jones, *The Greek City from Alexander to Justinian* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1940), 234. Herod donated a considerable sum to the games in Olympia and served at the *agónothetês* there; *War* 1.426–428. Lämmer posits that this was an honorary role since the games in Olympia were actually conducted by a council made up of ten men chosen long before the beginning of the games; see Manfred Lämmer, “King Herod’s Endowment to the Olympic Games,” in *Proceedings of the Pre-Olympic Seminar on the History of Physical Education and Sport in Asia*, ed. Uriel Simri (Netanya: Wingate Institute and Israel Ministry of Education and Sport, 1972), 31–50.
82. Welles, “Inscriptions,” no. 192.
83. *Ibid.*, no. 144.
84. Sartre, *Inscriptions de la Jordanie*, 42–46.
85. Thomas M. Weber, *Gadara-Umm Qes*, vol. 1, *Gadara Decapolitana. Untersuchungen zur Topographie, Geschichte, Architektur und der Bildenden Kunst einer “Polis Hellenis” im Ostjordanland*, Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins 30 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), 294–295.
86. For a comprehensive discussion about the people who participated in various performances held in ancient Palestine, see Chap. 3.
87. Various sums were paid to actors in Roman Egypt; see, for example, Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 3 (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1903), no. 519; Grenfell and Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1910), vol. 7, nos. 1025, 1050.
88. J Ta’anit 1 4, 64b. See Chaps. 3 and 5 for a more comprehensive discussion of the account.
89. Arthur W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), chap. 7, esp. 295–305. According to Liebeschuetz, there were two such associations in fourth-century CE Antioch, one for performers and the other for dancers; see John H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch: City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 145–146.

90. Welles, "Inscriptions," no. 192. On the relationship between the caesars and the synod, see Millar, *Emperor in the Roman World*, 456–463. There was a similar incident in Ankara (Ancyra), where a statue was erected for Ulpian Aelius Pompeianus, a benefactor of the sacred Hadrianic and Dionysiac *technitai*; see William H. Buckler and Josef Keil, "Two Resolutions of the Dionysiac Artists from Angora," *JRS* 16 (1926): 245–252.
91. Henry R. Immerwahr, "Dipinti from G5, C2," in *The Excavations at Dura Europos: Preliminary Report of the Ninth Season of Work, 1935–1936*, part 1, *The Agora and Bazaar*, ed. Michael I. Rostovtzeff et al. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1944), 203–265. For evidence regarding Egypt, see William L. Westermann, "Entertainment in Villages of Greco-Roman Egypt," *JEA* 18 (1932): 16–27.
92. Leviticus Rabbah 11, 9, ed. Mordechai Margulies (Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1953–1960), 240; and see also J Megillah 2 3, 73b and J Mo'ed Qatan 3 7, 83b. Lieberman maintained that the head of the *chora* was the *chorēgos*, but that this position was reserved for the Greek theater and was completely unknown to the sages of third-century CE Palestine; Saul Lieberman, *Hayerushalmi Kipshuto* (Jerusalem: Darom, 1934), 8 (Hebrew). It is more probable that the head of the *chora* was the director and trainer of the performers—the *archimimus*—similar to *Aurelia* from Dura Europos; see Immerwahr, "Dipinti from G5, C2," 254.
93. J Ta'anit 1 4, 64b.
94. John B. Ward-Perkins, *Roman Imperial Architecture* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1981), 292–296; Inge Nielsen, *Thermae et Balnea: The Architecture and Cultural History of Roman Public Baths*, 2 vols. (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1990), 1:105–114.
95. Large complexes with *palaestra* were constructed, for example, in Bostra and Gerasa; see Dentzer, Blanc, and Fournet, "Le développement urbain de Bosra," 98–103; Thomas Lepaon, "Les édifices balnéaires de Gerasa de la Décapole: Premières observations," *Syria* 85 (2008): 51–70.
96. Jones, *Greek City*, 221–225.
97. Welles, "Inscriptions," nos. 3–4; Gatier, *Inscriptions de la Jordanie*, vol. 2, *Région centrale*, 51–54, no. 29.
98. Leah Di Segni, "A Dated Inscription from Beth Shean and the Cult of Dionysos Ktistes in Roman Scythopolis," *SCI* 16 (1997): 142–143. On the role of the *aleiptes* in training athletes during the Roman period, see Clive Foss, "Ἀλειπτήριον," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 16 (1975): 217–226.
99. Welles, "Inscriptions," no. 170.
100. For example, a bronze statue placed on a pedestal with an incised inscription was erected in Scythopolis in honor of Aeschylus, a famous local wrestler who won competitions in various locales (I would like to thank Gabriel Mazor for this personal communication). The athletes came from well-to-do families, while participation in

- athletic contests gave the Graeco-Roman elite an opportunity to stake out their claim to Greek identity; see van Nijf, “Local Heroes,” 321–329.
101. Clarence A. Forbes, “Ancient Athletic Guilds,” *Classical Philology* 50 (1955): 238–252; Henri W. Pleket, “Some Aspects of the History of the Athletic Guilds,” *ZPE* 10 (1973): 197–227.
 102. Jerome, *Vita Hilarionis* 20 (PL 23, 36–38); Harold A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972), 73–212; Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 438–441.
 103. Welles, “Inscriptions,” no. 194.
 104. Alan Cameron, *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 201–229; Yaron Dan, “Circus Factions (Blues and Greens) in Byzantine Palestine,” in *The Jerusalem Cathedra*, vol. 1, ed. Lee I. Levine (Jerusalem and Detroit: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi and Wayne State University Press, 1981), 105–119.
 105. Baruch Lifshitz, “Une inscription byzantine de Césarée en Israël,” *REG* 70 (1957): 118–132; Lehmann and Holum, *Greek and Latin Inscriptions of Caesarea Maritima*, 112–114, no. 109.
 106. See below, Chap. 6.
 107. Roueché, *Performers and Partisans*, 57–60.
 108. Criminals: *Ant.* 15:273–274; 19:335–337. Prisoners of war: *War* 7:23–24, 37–38.
 109. T ‘Avodah Zarah 2, 7, ed. Zuckerman, 462.
 110. The language of R. Nathan’s homily, “Why should you go out to get killed?” which lists forms of punishment at the end of the Bar-Kokhba revolt (Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Bahodesh, 6, ed. Hayyim S. Horovitz and Israel A. Rabin [Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrmann, 1960], 227), might also be indicative of this practice. On the decrees of persecution and the executions in the wake of the Bar-Kokhba revolt, see Saul Lieberman, “Persecution of the Jewish Religion,” in *Salo Baron Jubilee Volume*, vol. 3 (New York: American Academy of Jewish Research, 1974), 214–245 (Hebrew); Moshe D. Herr, “Persecutions and Martyrdom in Hadrian’s Days,” *SH* 23 (1972): 85–125.
 111. Eusebius, *History of the Martyrs* (in Syriac); and cf. the Greek version in Gustave Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée, Histoire ecclésiastique*, vol. 3, *Livres 8–10 et Les Martyrs en Palestine*, SC 55 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1967), 120–174; Ammianus Marcellinus 19.12.8, trans. John C. Rolfe, 3 vols., LCL 300, 315, 331 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1950–1952), 1:534.
 112. “Said R. Simeon b. Laqish: ‘If you were to sell yourself to *ludii*, then you would sell yourself at a high price’” (J Terumot 8 5, 45d). On the economic crisis that befell the Roman Empire in the third century CE and which was evident throughout ancient Palestine, see Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Jews under Roman and Byzantine Rule: A Political History from the Bar Kokhba War to the Arab Conquest* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984), 89–136; Lee I. Levine, “Palestine in the Third Century C.E.,” in *Eretz-Israel from the Destruction of the Second Temple to the Muslim Conquest*, vol. 1, ed. Zvi

- Baras et al. (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1982), 119–143 (Hebrew). On the glory of the victorious gladiators in the arena, see Keith Hopkins, *Death and Renewal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 19–26; José J. S. Gracia, “Gloire et mort dans l’arène: Les représentations des gladiateurs dans la Péninsule Ibérique,” in *Spectacula*, vol. 1, *Gladiateurs et amphithéâtres, Actes du colloque tenu à Toulouse et à Lattes les 26–29 mai 1987*, ed. Claude Domergue et al. (Paris: Imago; Lattes: Musée archéologique Henri Prades, 1990), 185–195.
113. J Gittin 4 9, 46b; B Gittin 46b–47a.
 114. Robert, *Les gladiateurs dans l’Orient Grec*, 283–285; Roueché, *Performers and Partisans*, 73–76.
 115. Eusebius, *History of the Martyrs* (in Syriac) 26 (24); Eusebius, *History of the Martyrs* (Greek version) 8.2–4, ed. Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée*, 145.
 116. “There were times when he had the choice of permitted and forbidden meat, and he left the former and took the latter” (B Gittin 46b–47a).
 117. B Gittin 47a.
 118. Ammianus Marcellinus 19.12.1, trans. Rolfe, vol. 1, 535.

CHAPTER 5 Adopting a Novelty

1. Samuel Krauss, *Persia and Rome in the Talmud and Midrashim* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1948), 220 (Hebrew); see also Gedaliah Alon, *The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age (70–640 C.E.)*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Magness, 1980), 135–136; Jean Juster, *Les juifs dans l’empire romain*, 2 vols. (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1914), 239–240; Baron and Talpaz differentiate between the Jews residing in the Diaspora, who attended the games, and those residing in ancient Palestine, who followed the rabbis’ dictum and refrained from going to these events; see Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 9; Gideon Talpaz, “The Theater in Talmudic Literature,” *Bamah* 9–10 (1961): 17–26 (Hebrew).
2. T ‘Avodah Zarah 2, 5, ed. Moshe S. Zuckerman (Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrmann, 1937), 462.
3. Levine defines the rabbinic class and doubts its centrality within wider Jewish society; see Lee I. Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1989). Goodman argues that the rabbis’ attempt to control the Jews of the Galilee solely on religious matters was largely unsuccessful; see Martin Goodman, *State and Society in Roman Galilee, A.D. 132–212* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allenheld, 1983), 93–111. S. Schwartz opines that the rabbis were marginal, had little glamour, few followers, and only minimal influence on Jewish society in the second and third centuries; see Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 103–176. Hezser argues that the rabbinic movement in Roman Palestine was neither centralized nor institutionalized, but comprised individual rabbis and small clus-

- ters of rabbis in various locales whose purported monopoly on the Torah put them into a position of power only over those who accepted their authority; see Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1997), 185–327, 353–404. S. S. Miller maintains that the rabbis were responsible for a significant body of the halakhah but that it was their circles and households that were responsible for spreading and perpetuating rabbinic culture. Other segments of Jewish society shared certain affinities with rabbinic circles and were living a life rooted in a “complex common Judaism”; see Stuart S. Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique Erez Israel: A Philological Inquiry into Local Traditions in Talmud Yerushalmi*, *Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism* 111 (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 446–466. Schremer continues this line of thought, maintaining that the rabbis worked under the assumption that Palestinian Jews were basically Torah oriented, observed the laws and rabbinic halakhah; see Adiel Schremer, “The Religious Orientation of Non-Rabbis in Second-Century Palestine: A Rabbinic Perspective,” in *“Follow the Wise” (B Sanhedrin 32b): Studies in Jewish History and Culture in Honor of Lee I. Levine*, ed. Zeev Weiss et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Jewish Theological Seminary, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and Eisenbrauns, 2010), 319–341.
4. Levine, *Rabbinic Class*, 38–42, 167–176. The *‘ammei ha-aretz* did not belong to any defined economic-social stratum, but the rabbis categorized them as such, belittling their laws of *terumot* and *ma’aserot*, as well as their purity laws. Büchler identifies them with the Galilean population of the second century CE, Zeitlin with farmers, and Urbach with the sectarians (*minim*); see Adolf Büchler, *The Galilean ‘Am Ha-Ares* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1964) (Hebrew); Solomon Zeitlin, “The Am Haarez: A Study in the Social and Economic Life of the Jews before and after the Destruction of the Second Temple,” *JQR* 23 (1932): 45–61; Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1979), 630–648. Oppenheimer, for his part, defines *‘am ha-aretz* as a nickname for the rabble who did not follow the rabbis’ dicta; see Aharon Oppenheimer, *The ‘Am Ha-aretz: A Study in the Social History of the Jewish People in the Hellenistic-Roman Period*, *Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums* 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 18–22, 170–188.
 5. *Ant.* 15.274–276, 279–281; and see also the discussion in Chap. 1. On the Jewish population, the size of their agricultural plots, and their land use in the first century CE, see Jack Pastor, *Land and Economy in Ancient Palestine* (London: Routledge, 1997), 6–12.
 6. Levine maintains that the construction of buildings for mass entertainment in Jerusalem did not engender any dramatic reactions on the part of the larger populace and that opposition in the city did not necessarily reflect the Zeitgeist of the local population, but rather the harsh and critical position taken by Josephus or his source; see Lee I. Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence?* The Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies (Seattle: University

- of Washington Press, 1998), 55–61. The story of Jews' pillaging fruit in the first-century Caesarean marketplace when the pagans had gone to their circuses (T Oholot 18, 16, ed. Zuckerman, 617) may be indicative of the fact that Jews did not attend games and spectacles in this early period.
7. Maurice Sartre, *The Middle East under Rome* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 151–205. Urbanization in Jewish society accelerated in the time of R. Judah the Patriarch (ca. 200 CE); see Lee I. Levine, "The Age of R. Judah I," in *Eretz Israel from the Destruction of the Second Temple to the Muslim Conquest*, ed. Zvi Baras et al. (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1982), 93–118, esp. 110–111 (Hebrew).
 8. See Chaps. 1 and 2.
 9. Shmuel Safrai, "The Jewish Settlement in the Galilee and Golan in the Third and Fourth Centuries," in *Eretz Israel from the Destruction of the Second Temple to the Muslim Conquest*, vol. 1, ed. Zvi Baras et al. (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1982), 144–179 (Hebrew); Goodman, *State and Society*, 129.
 10. For further details, see above, Chap. 4.
 11. The minting of coins with a Jewish character in Sepphoris and Tiberias is an indication of Jewish involvement in the municipal leadership in these cities. See Yaakov Meshorer, "Sepphoris and Rome," in *Greek Numismatics and Archaeology: Essays in Honor of Margaret Thompson*, ed. Otto Mørkholm and Nancy M. Waggoner (Wetteren, Belgium: Cultura, 1979), 159–172. Several *agoranomoi* were connected with the municipal administration in Tiberias and Sepphoris; see Eric M. Meyers, Carol L. Meyers, and Ehud Netzer, "Sepphoris—Ornament of All Galilee," *Biblical Archaeologist* 49 (1986): 16–17; Shraga Kedar, "Two Lead Weights of Herod Antipas and Agrippa II and the Early History of Tiberias," *INJ* 9 (1986–87): 29–35. On the status of the Galilean cities and their governmental organization, see Aharon Openheimer, "Roman Rule and the Cities of the Galilee in Talmudic Literature," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992), 115–125.
 12. See Ernest G. Clarke, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Deuteronomy*, The Aramaic Bible 5B (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 76.
 13. See the discussion above, Chap. 2.
 14. T 'Avodah Zarah 2, 5, ed. Zuckerman, 462.
 15. Moshe D. Herr, "External Influences on the Sages of the Land of Israel: Absorption and Rejection," in *Acculturation and Assimilation: Continuity and Change in the Cultures of Israel and the Nations*, ed. Joseph Kaplan and Menahem Stern (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1989), 89–92 (Hebrew). According to Jacobs, the rabbis also prohibited Jews from attending performances because they caused them to forget the Torah; see Martin Jacobs, "Theaters and Performances as Reflected in the Talmud Yerushalmi," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol. 1, ed. Peter Schäfer, Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 71 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 336–337.

16. Sifra, Aḥarei Mot, Parashah 9, 13, 9, ed. Isaac H. Weiss (New York: Om Publishing, 1946), 86.
17. A series of acts at times originating in the Graeco-Roman culture have been defined by the rabbis as “the ways of the Amorite” and were forbidden and considered contrary to God’s will; see T Shabbat 6, 1, ed. Saul Lieberman (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1955–1988), 22; Giuseppe Veltri, “Defining Forbidden Foreign Customs: Some Remarks on the Rabbinic Halakhah of Magic,” *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies, C/1: Rabbinic and Talmudic Literature* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1994), 25–32.
18. It is Hayes’s belief that this halakhah, which forbids all contact with and help to foreigners when conducting the games, reflects the historical reality in ancient Palestine, perhaps already in the first century CE; see Christine E. Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds: Accounting for Halakhic Difference in Selected Sugyot from Tractate Avodah Zara* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 174–179.
19. ed. Zuckerman, 462; J ‘Avodah Zarah 17, 40a.
20. The term used in rabbinic literature for “state,” *medinah*, means hyparchy, but more often it refers to the city itself; see, for example, Genesis Rabbah 50, 12, ed. Yehudah Theodor and Chanoch Albeck (Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1965), 530; see also the definition provided by Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1990), 291.
21. Tertullian similarly indicated that there is hardly any reason to go to the games other than *prius cogitat nisi videri et videre* (“to see and to be seen”); see Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 25.
22. Ramsay MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Reason, Unrest and Alienation in the Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 170–172. On the acclamations, their components, importance, and influence in the Roman world, see Gregory S. Aldrete, *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome*, Ancient Society and History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 101–164. On their prevalence in the eastern provinces, see Jean Colin, *Les villes libres de l’Orient gréco-romain et l’envoi au supplice par acclamations populaires* (Brussels: Latomus, 1965), 109–151.
23. Similar reasons causing the outbreak of riots in Antioch are described by two eye-witnesses, Libanius and John Chrysostom; see Robert Browning, “The Riot of A.D. 387 in Antioch: The Role of the Theatrical Claques in the Later Roman Empire,” *JRS* 42 (1952): 13–20. A mosaic from Smirat, North Africa, together with an inscription, describes the community’s request to a wealthy citizen, Megarius, to fund the animal shows held in one of the cities; see Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, Manuscripts on Classical Archaeology (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 67–69. The people of Gaza gathered in the theater, shouting their demand for the blood of the Christians who were thrown into prison for defacing the temple; see Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 5.9.1–2, ed. Joseph Bidez, *Sozomène*,

- Histoire Ecclésiastique*, Livres V–VI, vol. 3 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2005), 128–130.
24. Charlotte Roueché, “Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire: New Evidence from Aphrodisias,” *JRS* 74 (1984): 181–199.
 25. Similarly, R. Samuel bar Naḥmani, in the name of R. Yoḥanan, also attests in the third century CE that they “go to theaters, circuses, and basilica to supervise the business matters of many on the Sabbath”; see B Ketubot 5a; Shabbat 150a.
 26. Caesarea: *War* 2.172–174; *Ant.* 18.57. Tarichaeae: *War* 2.598; *Life* 27–28. Tiberias: *War* 2.618.
 27. See, for example, the homily in Leviticus Rabbah 6, 2, ed. Mordechai Margulies (Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1953–60), 128–129: “There once was an incident in which the authorities in Caesarea would whip the thieves and execute the recipients of stolen goods, and everyone in the province would make fun of him, telling him that he was not acting correctly. The next day he issued a proclamation throughout the province, saying: ‘Let all the people go out to the *campon*.’” The people of Caesarea vilified the city’s legal system whereby the recipients of the stolen goods, who bought the merchandise, were executed, and not the thieves who perpetrated the crime. The authorities in Caesarea—the Roman governor or the city council—demanded, as we are told in a homily, that they explain their motives and issued a proclamation, calling for the townspeople to come to the municipal hippodrome (*campon*) and air their views.
 28. *War* 7.23–24, 37–38. On decrees of persecution and the executions performed following the Bar Kokhba revolt, see Moshe D. Herr, “Persecutions and Martyrdom in Hadrian’s Days,” *SH* 23 (1972): 85–125.
 29. Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales* 7, trans. Richard M. Gummere, vol. 1, LCL 75 (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 28–32.
 30. Martial, *De Spectaculis Liber, Epigrammata* 29; see also Keith Hopkins, *Death and Renewal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). On the arena as a political theater in the Roman world, a reality that also emerges from an analysis of several rabbinic sources, see Joshua Levinson, “‘The Athlete of Piety’: Fatal Fictions in Rabbinic Literature,” *Tarbiz* 68 (1998): 61–86 (Hebrew).
 31. Timothy D. Barnes, *Tertullian, A History and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 159–160. Similarly, during the Bar Kokhba revolt, the governors approached the Jews before they were executed; see Saul Lieberman, “Persecution of the Jewish Religion,” in *Salo Baron Jubilee Volume*, vol. 3 (New York: American Academy of Jewish Research, 1974), 229–230 (Hebrew).
 32. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.15; Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 40.
 33. Eusebius, *De Martyribus Palaestina* 6.5. Gustave Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée, Histoire ecclésiastique*, vol. 3, *Livres 8–10 et Les Martyrs en Palestine*, SC 55 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1967), 139.
 34. B ‘Avodah Zarah 18b.

35. Genesis Rabbah 67, 4, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 756–757.
36. Pesiqta de Rav Kahana 15, 2, ed. Bernard Mandelbaum (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962), 250; and see also Lamentations Rabbah, Proem 3, ed. Shlomo Buber (Vilna: Romm, 1899), 3.
37. Pesiqta de Rav Kahana 26, 2, ed. Mandelbaum, 385.
38. J Berakhot 4 2, 7d; B Berakhot 28b. The prayer indeed appears in the name of R. Nehuniah ben Haqaneh, a *tanna* who lived after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. However, Ginzberg has remarked that it was not this rabbi's prayer, but one emended by the rabbis generations after him; see Louis Ginzberg, *A Commentary on the Palestinian Talmud*, 4 vols. (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1941–1961), 3:223 (Hebrew).
39. Lamentations Rabbah, Proem 17, ed. Buber, 7b.
40. Tessa Rajak, "Jews and Christians as Groups in a Pagan World," in "To See Ourselves as Others See Us": *Christians, Jews, and "Others" in Late Antiquity*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1985), 247–262.
41. Theater: *Every Good Man Is Free*, 141. Chariot races: *On Providence* 57. Athletics: *On Husbandry*, 111–117, 119–121. See also Harold A. Harris, *Greek Athletics and the Jews* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976), 51–95. Wolfson, in contrast, claims that Philo, or Jews like him, did not participate in performances held in their cities, but rather in games organized by Jewish clubs expressly for Jews; see Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947), 80–83.
42. Philo, *On the Life of Moses* 2.211–212.
43. Miletus: Walter Ameling, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis*, vol. 2, *Kleinasiën* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 167–172, nos. 37–39. Aphrodisias: Charlotte Roueché, *Performers and Partisans at Aphrodisias in the Roman and Late Roman Periods: A Study Based on Inscriptions from the Current Excavations at Aphrodisias in Caria*, Journal of Roman Studies Monographs 6 (London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 1993), 118–119, 124–125; Tyre: Maurice Chéhab, "Le Cirque de Tyr au Liban," *Archeologia* 55 (1973): 16–20; Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais, "Inscriptions de l'hippodrome de Tyr," *JRA* 15 (2002): 321–336.
44. In the mid-second century CE, Jews and pagans were present in the stadium in Smyrna for the execution of Polycarp by a lion; see Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.15:26–27. Barnes maintains that this occurred in 155 CE; see Timothy D. Barnes, "Pre-Decian *Acta Martyrum*," *JTS* 19 (1968): 509–514. St. Basil, Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, tells us that Jews and other townsmen streamed en masse to the games held in the city in honor of Mars, where one Martyr Gordius was executed; see St. Basil the Great, *Homilia* 18.3 (PG 31.496–497).
45. John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos* 1.4 (PG 48.848). On the Jews of Antioch in the fourth century CE, see Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Fourth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 49–65.

46. Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7.13 (PG 67.760–61).
47. St. Augustine, *Sermo* 9.3 (PL 38.77).
48. Pesiqta Rabbati, Add. 1, 4, ed. Meir Friedmann (Tel Aviv: Esther, 1963), 200.
49. Genesis Rabbah 67, 4, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 757–758; Lamentations Rabbah, Proem 17, ed. Buber, 7b.
50. David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*, vol. 1, *Italy (excluding the City of Rome), Spain and Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 28–30.
51. Enno Littmann, David Magie Jr., and Duane R. Stuart, *Greek and Latin Inscriptions*, Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expedition to Syria in 1904–1905, Division 3A (Leiden: Brill, 1921), no. 549; Maurice Sartre, *Bostra*, IGLS 13.1 (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1982), 338, no. 9407. The inscription opens with the term *eis theos*, which led the author to believe that Amazonios was a Christian actor (*ibid.*, 338). It is important to note that there is no Christian symbol on the tombstone, and since the term *eis theos* appears in the region more frequently in Jewish and Samaritan inscriptions than in Christian ones, it seems more likely that Amazonios was a Jew; see Leah Di Segni, “‘Εἷς θεός’ in Palestinian Inscriptions,” *SCI* 13 (1994): 94–115, esp. 108–109. Christoph Marksches (“The Price of Monotheism: Some Observations on a Current Debate about Late Antiquity,” in *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire*, ed. Stephan Mitchell and Peter van Nuffelen [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010], 100–111) maintains that Jews, Christians, and Samaritans all used the term *eis theos* and lived peacefully side by side, yet by using this exact term, each group “pointedly professed faith in one single helper, displaying a tendency to emasculate, subordinate and sublimate the gods worshipped by neighbours” (p. 108).
52. J Ta’anit 1 4, 64b; see also Louis Ginzberg, *Ginzei Schechter*, vol. 1 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1928), 403–404. Jacobs maintains that the story about Pantokakos is fabricated but nevertheless serves as an example of someone who performed an act of kindness even if his deeds are immoral; see Jacobs, “Theaters and Performances,” 341–343.
53. Outside ancient Palestine, an inscription from Hierapolis, Phrygia, refers to one Hikesios, also called Iudas, who participated in the *agōnes hieroi* and won the competition twice, in athletics and music; see Ameling, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis*, vol. 2, 402–404, no. 189.
54. Mordechai Margolioth, *Sefer Ha-Razim: A Newly Recovered Book of Magic from the Talmudic Period* (Jerusalem: Yediot Achronot, 1966), 94, 3:35–43 (Hebrew). For an English translation, see Michael A. Morgan, *Sepher Ha-Razim (The Book of the Mysteries)* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1983), 64. A similar practice is also noted in Christian society. According to Jerome, Italicus asked Hilarion, prior to a race, to bless his horses so they would win in the hippodrome against his pagan rival, whose magician strengthened his horses with demonic forces; see Jerome, *Vita Hilarionis* 20 (PL 23, 36–38). The use of amulet texts to win a horse race is known elsewhere in the Roman world; see discussion above, Chapter 3, and David R. Jordan, “A Survey of

- Greek Defixiones Not Included in the Special Corpora,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 26 (1985): 151–197, nos. 149, 167, 193; Jordan, “New Defixiones from Carthage,” in *The Circus and a Byzantine Cemetery at Carthage*, ed. John H. Humphrey, vol. 1 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), 117–134.
55. Jewish charioteers participated in the races held in Neapolis during the Samaritan revolt in 529 CE; see Ioannis Malalae, *Chronographia*, 18.35, ed. Ioannes Thurn, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 35 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 374. On the role of the Jews in the Byzantine circus, see Yaron Dan, “Circus Factions (Blues and Greens) in Byzantine Palestine,” in *The Jerusalem Cathedral*, vol. 1, ed. Lee I. Levine (Jerusalem and Detroit: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi and Wayne State University Press, 1981), 105–119; Andrew Sharf, “Byzantine Jewry in the Seventh Century,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 48 (1955): 103–115.
 56. M Shabbat 22, 6; see also Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1994), 92–96.
 57. Abraham Wasserstein, “Resh Laqish among the Robbers,” *Tarbiz* 49 (1979–1980): 197–198 (Hebrew). Resh Laqish drew on his personal experience for his sermons, as he did, for example, with regard to the festive meal on the eve of a gladiatorial combat (*cena libera*) hosted by a patron of the games and in which the gladiator’s wishes were fulfilled; see B Gittin 47a; see also Mark Z. Brettler and Michael B. Poliakoff, “Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish at the Gladiator’s Banquet: Rabbinic Observations on the Roman Arena,” *HTR* 83 (1990): 93–98.
 58. J Gittin 4 9, 46b; B Gittin 46b–47a.
 59. J Terumot 8 5, 45d and compare J ‘Avodah Zarah 2 3, 41b. On the economic crisis that plagued the Roman Empire in the third century CE and showed its signs throughout ancient Palestine, see Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Jews under Roman and Byzantine Rule: A Political History from the Bar Kokhba War to the Arab Conquest* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984), 89–136. A renewed analysis of the archaeological finds and literary sources indicates that the political and economic crises of the third century CE was insignificant throughout ancient Palestine and that, in fact, this was a period of continued prosperity; see Doron Bar, “Was There a 3rd-c Economic Crisis in Palestine?” in *The Roman and Byzantine Near East*, vol. 3, ed. John H. Humphrey, *Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series* 49 (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2002), 43–54. Bar is correct in his assessment, that the Late Roman period was one of growth and flourish, but his conclusions regarding the years of crisis in the mid-third century CE (235–284 CE) are not amply corroborated, especially by the archaeological evidence. Bar does not relate in his article to the epigraphic material, which would indeed strengthen the claim that the crisis was detrimental, or at least caused a significant slowdown, throughout ancient Palestine as well. For example, six of the seventy-nine inscriptions from Gerasa dating to the third century attest to building activity or to the dedication of buildings and monuments during these years of economic crisis. The finds from Caesarea, which are fewer, show that of the twenty-nine inscriptions dating to the same period, only two

- date to the years of crisis; see C. Bradford Welles, “The Inscriptions,” in *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis* (New Haven, CT: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1938), nos. 62, 74, 159, 190–191; Clayton M. Lehmann and Kenneth G. Holum, *The Greek and Latin Inscriptions of Caesarea Maritima*, The Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima, Excavation Reports 5 (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2000), nos. 11, 13.
60. Similar behavior is known elsewhere in the Roman world; see Hopkins, *Death and Renewal*, 19–26.
 61. Benjamin Mazar, *Beth She’arim: Report on the Excavations during 1936–1940*, vol. 1, *Catacombs 1–4* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1973), 184–185; Vassilios Tzaferis, “A Monumental Roman Tomb at Tell ‘Eitun,” *Atiqot* 8 (1982): 22–25 (Hebrew).
 62. Josephus, *The Life* 3; Martial, *Epigrammata*, 7.82.
 63. Victor Tcherikover, Alexander Fuks, and Menahem Stern, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum (CPJ)*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957–64), vol. 2, no. 153, col V 93, see there p. 53; to this one should add an athlete and wrestler mentioned in an inscription from Aphrodisias—although these were apparently gentile god-fearers who joined the Jewish community and its synagogue; see Joyce Reynolds and Robert Tannenbaum, *Jews and God-Fearers at Aphrodisias: Greek Inscriptions with Commentary*, Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society, Supplement 12 (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1987), 56–57, 119, 121.
 64. Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana*, 68.32; see also Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974–1984), 2:385–389.
 65. Genesis Rabbah 80, 1, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 950–953; and a parallel source in J Sanhedrin 2 6, 20c–d states that the sermon was delivered in Tiberias.
 66. The rabbis did not refrain from voicing their criticism of the Patriarchs in other instances as well; see Albert I. Baumgarten, “Rabbi Judah I and His Opponents,” *JSS* 12 (1982): 135–172.
 67. In the early third century CE, R. Efes lived in Sepphoris and R. Joshua ben Levi lived in Lod. Resh Laqish and R. Yoḥanan, and possibly also R. Yosi bar Ḥanina, lived in Tiberias in the second half of the third century CE. R. Ami and R. Eliezer ben Pedat lived in Tiberias in the first half of the fourth century, and at the same time R. Ḥama bar Ḥanina, lived in Sepphoris, R. Abbahu in Caesarea, and R. Samuel bar R. Naḥman and R. Judah ben Simeon ben Pazi lived in Lod. In the second half of the fourth century, R. Jeremiah lived in Tiberias, R. Jacob bar Zavdi in Caesarea, and Judah ben Simeon (ben Pazi) in Lod. In at least one instance it is clear that R. Judan bar R. Ḥama of Kefar Teḥumin, an *amora* whose period of activity is unknown, lived in a small town, perhaps on the border between the Upper and Lower Galilee. According to Lapin, the third- and fourth-century CE rabbis belong to an urban elite that was active in several areas, such as law and education; see Hayim Lapin, “Rabbis and Cities: Some Aspects of the Rabbinic Movement in Its

- Graeco-Roman Environment,” in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol. 2, ed. Peter Schäfer and Catherine Hezser, *Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum* 79 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 51–80.
68. Tanḥuma, Ḥayyei Sarah, 3; Exodus Rabbah, Bo, 15, 22 (Vilna).
 69. See the discussion above, in Chap. 2.
 70. T Oholot 18, 16, ed. Zuckerman, 617.
 71. Genesis Rabbah 87, 7, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 1072. A parallel to the homily in Pesiqta Rabbati 6, ed. Friedmann, 23, reads a bit differently: “R. Nehemiah says it is a day of entertainment in the theater and circus.” This version does not change R. Nehemiah’s intention, but it does reflect the types of buildings for entertainment in ancient Palestine, where performances were held simultaneously in the theater and hippodrome—as elsewhere.
 72. Juvenal, *Satire*, 11: “totam hodie Roman circus capit.”
 73. J Sukkah 5 4, 55c [top]; and see parallels in J Sanhedrin 2 4, 20b and Numbers Rabbah 4, 20.
 74. Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine*, 33.
 75. Comparing David’s act to that of an *orchēstēs* also appears in the writings of the third-century CE church father Cyprian, *De Spectaculis* 3 (PL 4.782).
 76. Pesiqta de Rav Kahana, 28, 3, ed. Mandelbaum, 426–427.
 77. Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine*, 38 n. 51a.
 78. Midrash on Psalms 17, 5, ed. Shlomo Buber (New York: Om, 1948), 64b.
 79. Nonnos of the fifth century CE describes the spectators who were riveted to the horse races, the tension accompanying them, and the hope for the victory of a certain rider. This is a legendary description of a race that took place in Olympia between Erechtheus and Oinomaos, but it seems to reflect what transpired in the Roman-Byzantine hippodrome that R. Abin described in his sermon; see Nonnos, *Dionysiaca* 37.269–278.
 80. John H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1986), figs. 72, 114, 125.
 81. J Terumot 8 5, 45d; J ‘Avodah Zarah, 2 3, 41b.
 82. Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine*, 148–149.
 83. B Qiddushin 63a.
 84. Daniel Sperber, *Essays on Greek and Latin in the Mishna, Talmud and Midrashic Literature* (Jerusalem: Makor, 1982), 114–115.
 85. B Bava Bathra 103a–b.
 86. Pesiqta de Rav Kahana 15, 2, ed. Mandelbaum, 250; compare J Sukkah 5 4, 55c (top).
 87. Pesiqta de Rav Kahana 26, 2, ed. Mandelbaum, 385; and compare Tanḥuma, Aḥarei Mot, 2, ed. Shlomo Buber, reprod. (Jerusalem: Ortsel, 1964), 28; Ecclesiastes Rabbah 2, 2. This is intimated again in another sermon delivered by Rabbi Abba bar Kahana, mentioned above, in which he cites the Jewish people pleading before God that they never went into the theaters and circuses of the nations; see Pesiqta de Rav Kahana, 15, 2, ed. Mandelbaum, 250. Rabbi Abba bar Kahana, who speaks in the

- first person, is apparently indicating that he personally did not attend the Roman games, but he may be inferring that others—either rabbis or disciples—did so.
88. Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7.13 (PG 67.760–761).
 89. Ruth Webb, *Demons and Dancers, Performance in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 197–216.
 90. Tertullian, *De Spectaculis*, 7. In the following chapters, Tertullian further elaborates on the pageantry aspect of each building; see *ibid.*, 8–12; see also Barnes, *Tertullian*, 93–96, for a discussion on Tertullian’s attitudes toward Roman public games.
 91. For example, St. Clemens, bishop of Alexandria, considered the buildings for mass entertainment as meeting places for the enemies of Christianity. Performances are immoral, arouse passions and depravity, incite riots in the city, and therefore must be prohibited; see Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 3.11 (PG 8.653). Similar expressions appear, for example, in Cyprian, *Epistola* 1.7–8; and Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum* 4.208.
 92. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Cathechesis* 1.6. Some maintain that this saint’s five lectures were composed by St. John, Cyril’s successor as bishop of the Jerusalem church after Cyril’s death; see Guy G. Stroumsa, “From Cyril to Sophronius: the Christian Literature of Byzantine Jerusalem,” in *The History of Jerusalem: The Roman and Byzantine Periods (70–638 CE)*, ed. Yoram Tsafrir and Shmuel Safrai (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1999), 424–426 (Hebrew), with references to additional literature.
 93. John Chrysostom, *Contra circenses ludos et theatra* (PG 56.263–270).
 94. John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Matt.* 7.7 (PG 57.81).
 95. John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Matt.* 37.6 (PG 57.426).
 96. See Cyril Moss, “Jacob of Serugh’s Homilies on the Spectacles of the Theatre,” *Le Muséon* 48 (1935): 97, 106.
 97. Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, AD 150–750 (London: Norton, 1989), 53–54.
 98. Richard F. DeVoe Jr., “The Christians and the Games: The Relationship between Christianity and the Roman Games from the First through the Fifth Centuries, A.D.” (PhD diss., Texas Tech University, 1987), 2–11, 134–165. According to Barnes, theatrical performances were popular in the Byzantine period despite the church fathers’ objections to them; see Timothy D. Barnes, “Christians and the Theater,” in *Roman Theater and Society: E. Togo Salmon Papers*, ed. William J. Slater (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 161–180.
 99. Jaclyn L. Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 133–134.
 100. Several edicts prohibiting games on Sundays were issued between 392 and 409 CE so as to prevent Christians from attending the games (CTh 2.8.20, 22–23, 25), and in 425 CE Theodosius II issued an edict prohibiting games of all kinds on Sundays and feast days (CTh 15.5.5). According to Lim, the unsuccessful attempts by some to oppose the spectacles with canonical rulings and requests for imperial rescripts suggest the absence of a unified Christian view on the matter, and even in the early

- sixth century, he argues, there are no imperial efforts to suppress traditional games and festivals in order to Christianize society more fully; see Richard Lim, “Consensus and Dissensus on Public Spectacles in Early Byzantium,” in *Conformity and Non-Conformity in Byzantium*, ed. Lynda Garland, *Byzantinische Forschungen* 24 (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1997), 159–179.
101. Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 3; and compare St. Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 3.11 (PG 8.653).
 102. Avot de R. Nathan, A, 21, ed. Schneur Z. Schechter (New York: Feldheim, 1945), 74; and compare the statement by R. Simeon ben Pazi in B ‘Avodah Zarah 18b. It is possible that Tertullian had access to Jewish sources, but it is equally possible that he and R. Meir expounded the Psalm verse similarly yet independent of each other. Baer opines that Tertullian used Jewish material but does not tell how he came about it; see Yitzhak F. Baer, “Israel, the Christian Church and the Roman Empire from the Time of Septimius Severus to the Edict of Toleration of A.D. 313,” *SH* 7 (1961): 86–95.
 103. Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 2.
 104. Genesis Rabbah 67, 3, ed. Theodor and Albeck, 756–757.
 105. John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Matt.* 2.6 (PG 57.50–51).
 106. Pesiqta Rabbati, Add. 1, 4, ed. Friedmann, 200. Hezser maintains that late antique synagogues and churches competed with the theater by enhancing the visual and theatrical effects of their religious rituals, developing the liturgical structure, and encouraging the audience to participate in the rites; see Catherine Hezser, “Towards the Study of Jewish Popular Culture in Roman Palestine,” in *The Words of a Wise Man’s Mouth Are Gracious* (*Qoh* 10,12). *Festschrift for Günter Stemberger on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Mauro Perani (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 267–297.
 107. Blake Leyerle, *Theatrical Shows and Ascetic Lives: John Chrysostom’s Attack on Spiritual Marriage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 67.
 108. For Origen’s use of scenes taken from the theater and stadium, for example, see Leonardo Lugaresi, *Il teatro di Dio: Il problema degli spettacoli nel cristianesimo antico (II–IV secolo)* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2008), 509–533.
 109. See also Victor C. Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif: Traditional Athletic Imagery in the Pauline Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 82–98, 187–195.
 110. Michael B. Poliakoff, “Jacob, Job, and Other Wrestlers: Reception of Greek Athletics by Jews and Christians in Antiquity,” *Journal of Sport History* 11 (1984): 48–65. This perception resurfaces in Christian art as well, where Elijah and Hanoch, for example, are portrayed as *venatores* in the church in Nicopolis; see Ernst Kitzinger, “Studies on Late Antique and Early Byzantine Floor Mosaics,” *DOP* 6 (1951): 108–122.
 111. Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 29.
 112. Origen, *Oratio* 28.3.
 113. Jerome, *Tractatus de Psalmo* 128 (CCSL 78.271).
 114. Jerome, *Epistola* 43 (PL 22.479).

115. John Chrysostom, *Stavronikita* 3.9; and see Antoine Wenger, ed., *Huit catéchèses baptismales inédites* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1970), 155–156.

CHAPTER 6 Public Spectacles and Sociocultural Behavior in Late Antique Palestine

1. Richard Lim, “People as Power: Games, Munificence, and Contested Topography,” *The Transformations of Urbs Roma in Late Antiquity*, ed. William V. Harris, JRA Supplementary Series 33 (Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1999), 265–281.
2. CTh 15.5.5.
3. Timothy D. Barnes, “Christians and the Theater,” in *Roman Theater and Society: E. Togo Salmon Papers*, ed. William J. Slater (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 161–180. Lim maintains that the successive laws sought to define the role of spectacles in public life and classified them as secular; see Richard Lim, “Consensus and Dissensus on Public Spectacles in Early Byzantium,” in *Conformity and Non-Conformity in Byzantium*, ed. Lynda Garland, *Byzantinische Forschungen* 24 (Amsterdam; Adolf M. Hakkert, 1997), 159–179.
4. CTh 15.12.1; see David S. Potter, “Constantine and the Gladiators,” *Classical Quarterly* 60 (2010): 596–606.
5. Georges Ville, “Les jeux des gladiateurs dans l’empire chrétien,” *Mélanges d’archéologie et d’histoire* 72 (1960): 318–319; David L. Bomgardner, *The Story of the Roman Amphitheatre* (London: Routledge, 2000), 204–207. According to Ville (“Les jeux,” 332–333), the high cost of the gladiatorial combats was the main reason for their disappearance; Wiedemann, on the other hand, arguing for the complexity of the process, suggests that Christian society in late antiquity did not need the gladiatorial combats to serve as a symbol dividing social segments, nor did it use them as a vehicle for the entry or reentry of a sinner into society; see Thomas Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators* (London: Routledge, 1992), 146–160.
6. David Potter, *The Victor’s Crown: A History of Ancient Sport from Homer to Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 308–314.
7. For a comprehensive discussion of the spectacles held in the late antique city, see Helen G. Saradi, *The Byzantine City in the Sixth Century: Literary Images and Historical Reality* (Athens: Perpinia, 2006), 295–324.
8. *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium* 32, trans. and comm. Jean Rougé, SC 124 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1966), 166. On the description of Caesarea in the *Expositio*, see Kenneth G. Holm, “*Et dispositione civitatis in multa eminens*: Comprehending the Urban Plan of Fourth-Century Caesarea,” in *Man Near a Roman Arch: Studies Presented to Prof. Yoram Tsafrir*, ed. L. Di Segni et al. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2009), 169*–189*.
9. Eusebius, *History of the Martyrs in Palestine* (in Syriac), trans. and ed. William Cureton (London: Williams and Norgate, 1861); cf. the Greek version in Gustave

- Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée, Histoire ecclésiastique*, vol. 3, *Livres 8–10 et Les Martyrs en Palestine*, SC 55 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1967), 120–174.
10. Eusebius, *History of the Martyrs* (Greek version) 6.1–2, 5, ed. Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée*, 138–139; Eusebius, *History of the Martyrs* (in Syriac), 11 (10), 21 (19).
 11. Eusebius, *History of the Martyrs* (in Syriac) 26 (24); Eusebius, *History of the Martyrs* (Greek version) 8.2–4, ed. Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée*, 145.
 12. Eusebius, *History of the Martyrs* (Greek version) 6.2, ed. Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée*, 138–139; Ernest Will, “La coupe de Césarée de Palestine au Musée du Louvre,” *Monuments et Mémoires* 65 (1983): 1–24; Yehudit Turnheim and Sonia Mucznik, “The Caesarea Cup Reconsidered,” in ΚΑΛΑΘΟΣ, *Studies in Honour of Asher Ovadiah*, ed. Yehudit Turnheim, Sonia Mucznik, and Talila Michaeli, *Assaph Studies in Art History* 10–11 (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2005–2006), 637–650.
 13. Ioannis Malalae, *Chronographia*, 15.8, ed. Ioannes Thurn, *Ioannis Malalae, Chronographia*, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 35 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 305.
 14. Baruch Lifshitz, “Une inscription byzantine de Césarée en Israël,” *REG* 70 (1957): 118–132; Walter Ameling et al., *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae (CIIP)*, vol. 2, *Caesarea and the Middle Coast, 1121–2160* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 116–119, no. 1196.
 15. Choricus, *Apologia Mimorum* 32.95, ed. Richard Foerster and Eberhard Richtsteig, *Choricii Gazaei, Opera*, *Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1929), 365.
 16. Carol A. M. Glucker, *The City of Gaza in the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, B.A.R. International Series 325 (Oxford: B.A.R., 1987), 43–74. For the absorption of pagan culture into Christian Gaza, see Pierre Chuvin, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 115–118. According to Ashkenazi, sophists and clergy lived in harmony with each other; see Yakov Ashkenazi, “Sophists and Priests in Late Antique Gaza According to Choricus the Rhetor,” in *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*, ed. Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Aryeh Kofsky, *Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture* 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 195–208.
 17. *Expositio* 32, ed. Rougé, 166.
 18. Jerome, *Vita Hilarionis* 16, 20 (PL 23, 35–38).
 19. Choricus, *Apologia Mimorum* 32, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig, 344–380; see also Violaine Malineau, “L’apport de l’Apologie des mimes de Choricus de Gaza à la connaissance du théâtre du VI^e siècle,” in *Gaza dans l’Antiquité Tardive. Archéologie, rhétorique et histoire*, ed. Catherine Saliou, *Actes du colloque international de Poitiers*, 6–7 mai 2004 (Salerno: Helios, 2005), 149–169. On the religious festivals and performances held in the city in the time of Choricus, see Fotios K. Litsas, “Choricus of Gaza and His Description of Festivals at Gaza,” *JÖB* 32/3 (1982): 427–436.
 20. Choricus, *Apologia Mimorum* 32.114–118, 141–142, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig, 370–371, 376–377.

21. Choricus, *Laud. Marc.* 2.70, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig, 45.
22. Procopius of Gaza, *Panegyricus in Imp Anastasium* 16, ed. Eugenio Amato, *Procopius Gazaens, Opuscula rhetorica et oratoria* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 96.
23. Choricus, *Apologia Mimorum* 32.114–118, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig, 370–371.
24. Procopius of Gaza, *Ekphrasis*, 42, ed. Paul Friedländer, *Spätantiker Gemäldezyklus in Gaza des Prokopios von Gaza Ekphrasis Eikonos*, *Studi e testi* 89 (Vatican: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1939), 18 (l.424).
25. Aldo Corcella, “Annesso: Le due monodie del *Laur. Plut.* 60,6,” in *Thesaurus Procopii Gazaeci, Opuscula rhetorica et oratoria, epistulae et fragmenta*, ed. Eugenio Amato, Bastien Kindt, et CENTAL (Turnhout: Brepols, in press). I would like to thank Aldo Corcella for sharing this important reference and for allowing me to cite his study prior to its publication.
26. Procopius of Gaza, *Panegyricus in Imp Anastasium* 15, ed. Amato, *Procopius Gazaens*, 96.
27. Choricus, *Apologia Mimorum* 32.107, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig, 369.
28. Barsanuphius and John of Gaza, *Correspondence* 836–837, trans. Lucien Regnault, comm. François Neyt et al., *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza: Correspondance*, 3 vols. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997–2002), 3:314–318. The correspondence of these two holy men touches upon various aspects of monastic life, ecclesiastical activity in Gaza, and some municipal affairs; see Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Aryeh Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 82–106.
29. Barsanuphe and John of Gaza, *Correspondence* 453, trans. Regnault, vol. 2.2, 534–536.
30. Jerome, *Vita Hilarionis* 20 (PL 23, 36–38).
31. Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.9.1–2, ed. Joseph Bidez, *Sozomène, Histoire Ecclésiastique*, Livres V–VI, vol. 3 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2005), 128–130.
32. *Expositio Totius Mundi* 32, ed. Rougé, 166.
33. John Rufus, *Plerophoriae*, 52, in *Patrologia Orientalis* 8.1, ed. François Nau (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1912), 107.
34. Ammianus Marcellinus 19.12.1–13, trans. John C. Rolfe, 3 vols.; LCL 300, 315, 331 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1950–1952), 1:535–541.
35. Ioannis Malalae, *Chronographia*, 15.8, 18.35, ed. Thurn, 305, 374.
36. Leah Di Segni, “The Greek Inscriptions of Ḥammāt Gader,” in Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Roman Baths of Hammat Gader* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1997), nos. 6, 10, 19, and 25.
37. Louis Robert, *Études épigraphiques et philologiques* (Paris: Champion, 1938), 99–102. For a translation of the tablet, see John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 51–53.
38. Ameling et al., *CIIP*, 559–562, no. 1679.
39. C. Bradford Welles, “The Inscriptions,” in *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis* (New Haven, CT: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1938), no. 279; see also Chester

- C. McCown, “The Festival Theater at the Birketein,” in *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis*, ed. Carl H. Kraeling (New Haven, CT: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1938), 159–167.
40. Herbert Donner, *The Mosaic Map of Madaba: An Introductory Guide*, Palaestina antiqua 7 (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992), 47–48, 75. For further discussion of the architectural background of this depiction of Gaza and Neapolis, see Zeev Weiss, “Games and Spectacles in Ancient Gaza: Performances for the Masses Held in Buildings Now Lost,” in *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*, ed. Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Aryeh Kofsky, Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 24–28.
 41. The theater in Gaza has not yet been located or excavated, whereas the building in Neapolis is well known in both phases; see Yitzhak Magen, *Flavia Neapolis: Shechem in the Roman Period*, Judea and Samaria Publications 11, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Staff Officer of Archaeology—Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria, Israel Antiquities Authority, 2009), 95–147.
 42. Glen W. Bowersock, *Mosaics as History: The Near East from Late Antiquity to Islam*, Revealing Antiquity 16 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 31–63.
 43. Classical monuments never ceased to be appreciated for their artistic value, especially by the learned urban elite; see Helen Saradi-Mendelovici, “Christian Attitudes toward Pagan Monuments in Late Antiquity and Their Legacy in Later Byzantine Centuries,” *DOP* 44 (1990): 47–61.
 44. The abandoned chambers in the hippodrome of Gerasa contained throughout late antiquity some pottery kilns, industrial installations, dwellings, and even a small church established there in 570 CE (see next note); see Ina Kehrberg and Antoni A. Ostrasz, “A History of Occupational Changes at the Site of the Hippodrome of Gerasa,” *SHAJ* 6 (1997): 167–173; Ina Kehrberg, “Byzantine Ceramic Productions and Organizational Aspects of Sixth Century AD Pottery Workshops at the Hippodrome of Jarash,” *SHAJ* 10 (2009): 493–512.
 45. See, for example, Caesarea: Yosef Porath, “Caesarea,” in *NEAEHL*, vol. 5, ed. Ephraim Stern (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2008), 1661–1662. Gerasa: Michał Gawlikowski and Ali Musa, “The Church of Bishop Marianos,” in *Jerash Archaeological Project, 1981–1983*, vol. 1, ed. Fawzi Zayadine (Amman: Department of Antiquities of Jordan, 1986), 137–162. Abila: John D. Wineland, *Ancient Abila: An Archaeological History*, B.A.R. International Series 989 (Oxford: Hadrian Books, 2001), 35–37.
 46. Personal communication. I would like to thank Peter Gendelman for sharing this information with me prior to its publication.
 47. Mark Whittow, “Ruling the Late Roman and Early Byzantine City: A Continuous History,” *Past and Present* 129 (1990): 3–29.
 48. Antipatris: Moshe Kochavi, *Aphek-Antipatris: Five Thousand Years of History* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1989), 109 (Hebrew). Scythopolis: Walid Atrash, “Entertainment Structures in the Civic Center of Nysa-Scythopolis (Beth-She’an)

- during the Roman and Byzantine Periods” (PhD diss., University of Haifa, 2006) (Hebrew), 68–71. Hippos: Arthur Segal, “The Odeion Excavated in Hippos-Sussita,” *Études et Travaux* 25 (2012): 366–368. Pella: Robert H. Smith and Leslie P. Day, *Pella of the Decapolis*, vol. 2, *Final Report on the College of Wooster Excavations in Area IX, the Civic Complex, 1979–1985* (Wooster, OH: College of Wooster, 1989), 28. Philadelphia: Adnan Hadidi, “Amman-Roman Forum,” in *Archaeology of Jordan*, vol. 2, part 2, ed. D. Homès-Fredericq and John B. Hennessy, Akkadica Suppl. 7–8 (Leuven: Peeters, 1989), 155–166. Petra: Philip C. Hammond, *The Excavation of the Main Theater at Petra, 1961–1962: Final Report*, Colt Archaeological Institute Publications (London: B. Quaritch, 1965), 65.
49. Caesarea: Yosef Porath, “The Evolution of the Urban Plan of Caesarea’s Southwest Zone: New Evidence from the Current Excavations,” in *Caesarea Maritima: Retrospective after Two Millennia*, ed. Avner Raban and Kenneth G. Holum, *Documenta et monumenta Orientis antiqui* 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 116–118. Scythopolis: Yoram Tsafirir and Gideon Foerster, “Urbanism at Scythopolis–Beth Shean in the Fourth to Seventh Centuries,” *DOP* 51 (1997): 134. Gerasa: Antoni A. Ostrasz, “The Hippodrome of Gerasa: A Report on Excavations and Research 1982–1987,” *Syria* 66 (1989): 74.
 50. Caesarea: Personal communication. Eleutheropolis: Amos Kloner and Alain Hübsch, “The Roman Amphitheater of Bet Guvrin: A Preliminary Report on the 1992, 1993, and 1994 Seasons,” *Atiqot* 30 (1996): 85–106.
 51. Gabriel Mazor and Arfan Najjar, *Nysa-Scythopolis: The Caesareum and the Odeum*, Israel Antiquities Authority Reports 33 (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2007), 11–14.
 52. Atrash, “Entertainment Structures,” 64–65.
 53. Claudia Bührig, “Das Theater-Tempel-Areal von Gadara / Umm Qais: Struktureller Wandel eines urbanen Raumes,” *Zeitschrift für Orient-Archäologie* 2 (2009): 181–183.
 54. Samaria: William J. Fulco and Fawzi Zayadine, “Coins from Samaria-Sebaste,” *ADAJ* 25 (1981): 197–199; Gerasa: Vincent A. Clarke, “The Archaeology of the Roman Theater,” in *Jerash Archaeological Project, 1981–1983*, vol. 1, ed. Fawzi Zayadine (Amman: Department of Antiquities of Jordan, 1986), 231–247.
 55. Tsafirir and Foerster, “Urbanism at Scythopolis,” 105–106, 133–135.
 56. Neapolis: Magen, *Flavia Neapolis*, 225.
 57. Evidence of later development in the theater in Ḥammad Gader and Capitolias was assigned in general to late antiquity without being able to date it more precisely; see, for example, Ahmad J. al-Shami, “A New Discovery at Bayt Rās / Capitolias-Irbid,” *ADAJ* 49 (2005): 509–519.
 58. Saradi, *Byzantine City*, 315–315. Choricus delivered a speech in the theater in Gaza, and the audience got up in the middle of his oration because his voice refused to minister to his zeal; see Choricus, *Orationes* 17.2 (= *Dialexeis* 27), ed. and trans. Robert J. Penella, *Rhetorical Exercises from Late Antiquity: A Translation of Chori-*

- cius of Gaza's Preliminary Talks and Declamations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 50.
59. Walid Atrash, "The Roman Theater at Tiberias," *Qadmoniot* 144 (2012): 86 (Hebrew).
 60. Avraham Negev, *The Greek Inscriptions from the Negev*, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Collectio Minor 25 (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing, 1981), 73–76.
 61. Atrash, "Entertainment Structures," 66–68.
 62. Neapolis: Magen, *Flavia Neapolis*, 131–137.
 63. Antonio Frova et al., *Scavi di Caesarea Maritima* (Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1966), 182–184. Retzleff is unconvincing in her argument that the modifications made in Neapolis and Caesarea are unrelated to the conversion of the orchestra for aquatic performances but instead were due to continuous use and damage that necessitated repairs and renovations; see Alexandra Retzleff, "Near Eastern Theaters in Late Antiquity," *Phoenix* 57 (2003): 115–138.
 64. Eli Shenhav, "Shuni/Maiamas," *Qadmoniot* 23 (1990): 58–62 (Hebrew); Shenhav, "The Maiumas Cult in Light of the Excavations at Shuni," *New Studies on the Coastal Plain: Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Conference of the Department of the Land of Israel Studies in Honor of Prof. Yehudah Felix*, ed. Eyal Regev (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1997), 56–70 (Hebrew). Flavius Marcianus Antipater is mentioned in the two unpublished inscriptions studied by Leah Di Segni; I would like to thank her for allowing me to read her manuscript and quote it prior to its publication. For details regarding the aqueduct, see Yizhar Hirschfeld, *Ramat Hanadiv Excavations: Final Report of the 1984–1998 Seasons* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2000), 337–341.
 65. Frova et al., *Scavi di Caesarea Maritima*, 159–164, 184.
 66. Elusa: Haim Goldfus and Peter Fabian, "Elusa—1997," *ESI* 111 (2000): 93*–94*. For the other theaters, see references in earlier notes.
 67. Clarke, "Archaeology of the Roman Theater," 235, 247.
 68. Caesarea: John H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1986), 480–482. Bostra: No report or even preliminary study has ever been published following these excavations. I would to thank my colleague Pierre M. Blanc for sharing this information with me.
 69. Richard Lim, "Christianization, Secularization, and the Transformation of Public Life," in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. Philip Rousseau (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 497–511.
 70. Choricus, *Apologia Mimorum* 32.51, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig, 355.
 71. Ibid., 32.30, 351; Jacob of Serugh, *Homilies on the Spectacles of the Theatre* 5, in Cyril Moss, "Jacob of Serugh's Homilies on the Spectacles of the Theatre," *Le Muséon* 48 (1935): 100, 108–109.
 72. See Jason König, *Athletics and Literature in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 133–134; Maurice Sartre, *Bostra*, IGLS 13.1 (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1982), 190–192, no. 9119. An inscription found in Gaza dated to 569 CE

- mentions a young athlete who passed away at the age of seventeen while “completing the contest in the prize winning stadia”: Gucker (*City of Gaza*, 128–130) believes that the boy died in the actual contest held in the city at this time, whereas Di Segni (“Dated Greek Inscriptions from Palestine from the Roman and Byzantine Periods” [PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997], 1:528–530) interprets it in a Christian context as “carrying out the struggle of life in the service of God.”
73. Bomgardner, *Story of the Roman Amphitheatre*, 217–219; Saradi, *Byzantine City*, 295–306.
 74. Procopius of Gaza, *Panegyricus in Imp Anastasium*, 15, ed. Amato, *Procopius Gazaeus*, 96; Choricus, *Apologia Mimorum* 32.107, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig, 369.
 75. Saradi, *Byzantine City*, 305–306.
 76. Ruth Webb, *Demons and Dancers: Performance in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 58–138.
 77. Choricus, *Apologia Mimorum* 32.116, ed. Foerster and Richtsteig, 371.
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